UNDER MY OWN ROOF

BY - - -

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Under My Own Roof

By

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"My house, my house, tho thou art small,
Thou art to me the Escurial."

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UNDER MY OWN ROOF

CHAPTER I

I AWOKE last night in such a fright that I felt my hair rising. It wasn't a burglar, but I had made a Welsh rabbit for Cincinnatus the evening before, and for myself as well, and the consequent nightmare took the worst form imaginable —I dreamed that I was boarding again. I wonder what Cincinnatus dreamed, poor man! It took me some time to convince myself that I was in my own house, which I had "bought and paid for" with my own money. I put on a wrapper, lighted my candle, and walked all over the house to assure myself that it was there. I went out on the veranda and even stepped out on the lawn so that I might view the outside of the little house.

I admit that I am foolish about my house. Cincinnatus says I am quite as foolish about my horse. Perhaps I am. A woman who has put

many years of her life into her possessions naturally thinks more of them than does one who has had them willed to her. Josh Billings used to say that a self-made man is apt to be too proud of the job. It may be the same with a self-made woman.

But why shouldn't I love my house? I have dreamed of it through twenty years of boarding, light housekeeping, furnished rooms, flats, and all other imaginable modes of existence in other people's houses.

"Every wise woman buildeth her a house," saith the Preacher. This statement may have been true in his times, but, unfortunately, it is not so to-day. No doubt every woman, wise or otherwise, wishes to build a house, but in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred she never gets beyond the desire. "My discontented sisters," I feel like saying, whenever I see a homeless woman, "you have a perfect right to a home of your own; yea, more, to a house of your own, and the only way to build one is just to build, as I did."

There came a day in my history when I was more than usually tired, both in body and spirit. I had nerves, to make a clean breast of it. I chafed between the four walls of my boarding-

house room; I was tired of looking out on back yards, though that was better than looking out on streets. I sat down on the floor and cried real salt tears. I wanted something, but I was not sure what it was. All at once I began to diagnose my case. Then I jumped up and threw a pillow at the chandelier, crying, "Eureka! I will build a house, if it isn't any bigger than a packing-box. I will have a garden too. I must have it; that is what I have been wanting all these years. I want ground to dig in, I want closets to rummage, I want to count my teaspoons—in short, I want a house and lot."

I spent that evening planning where the house should be situated, and before I slept I decided that it must be in New Jersey, within a convenient distance of New York; for altho I meant to cut loose from the routine of office life, and lead a happy, care-free existence under my own vine and fig-tree, I must be within easy reach of editors and publishers, to say nothing of book-shops, picture-galleries, and the theaters.

Day after day I canvassed towns in all parts of Jersey. Some of them were so new that nothing but the station was visible, but a "boom" was always guaranteed in the near future. I in-

terviewed real estate agents who had lots for sale on terms both easy and uneasy. I investigated this town-on-the-hill, that by-the-sea, and the other far-from-the-madding-crowd. My desk was stacked with letters, but the more information I gleaned on the subject of building-lots the less I knew.

If Uncle Jacob had not come to the rescue I might have given the whole thing up. Uncle Jacob is a grand-uncle who "brought me up," and who made his fortune from a patent medicine. I will not tell what the compound is called, but I will say that his name and mine are not the same, for which I am thankful. Uncle Jacob has disapproved of my career ever since I started upon it, but when he heard of my decision to build a house he thought there might be some sense in me after all, and he wrote, telling me not to buy a lot till I should hear again from him. A few days later I found a deed for a building lot beside my plate at breakfast. The lot was situated in a "sizable" town in Jersey, behind the Palisades. The only drawback to my satisfaction was that my house must be near the plant where "Pollard's Patent Purifying Invigorator" is brewed and bottled. There! I have told the

name, but I was sure to do it. It is one of the grievances of my life that I owe the ground my house stands on to the success of the P. P. P. I.

The lot a sure thing, I began to draw my plans; or, rather, I tried to draw them. Drawing was not a part of the public-school curriculum when I went to school, and now when I wish to express myself pictorially I am hopelessly hampered. I was told that any one could draw on cross-section paper, so I secured some and made another attempt at the plans. Nothing which I produced suited me, so I sent for Jack. Jack is my cousin, and an architect.

He came as soon as he received my note, and congratulated me warmly on my good sense in deciding to build for myself. I told him that I knew exactly what I wanted—a tight, trig little house, which would never leak, no matter from which direction the rain came. It was to be a plain little house, but there must be nothing shabby about it. What I had must be good of its kind, and what I could not afford I would go without.

The lot was narrow, Uncle Jacob wrote, therefore the house must be narrow. I decided that I needed five rooms—a parlor, a dining-room, a

study, a square reception hall, my own room, two guest rooms, a kitchen, and a maid's room. Jack convinced me, after some reasoning, that I had planned for nine rooms.

"But I can't get along with less room," I insisted. "If I am to have a house I want a house, not a cooped-up excuse for one."

"Have the house as large as you like, Honor, but unless you stick to the five-room idea you will be obliged to add several hundred dollars to the original amount."

I immediately added the sum. I could not raise the original amount unless I disturbed some of my investments. Like many women, I have the utmost faith in government bonds, and I would sooner include a mortgage among the decorations of my house than sell one of my hard-earned bonds. However, it would not take me long to finish paying for my house; I would write and write and write, and if I could not raise the mortgage from the contents of my ink-bottle, I would take boarders or raise chickens.

Having thus reassured myself, I went on with my plan, Jack meantime smoking and reading the evening paper. An hour later I was very

well satisfied, and I showed the plan to Jack, who burst into a loud guffaw, which aggravated me very much. I had forgotten the staircase, and I had left no room for it, tho I had dwelt on my airy chambers, and talked about my attic, where I would hang herbs. I am never ill, and if I were I should not take herb tea, but herbs were intended to be hung in attics, and they should hang in mine. I had a very clear idea of that attic; I would rummage my chests on rainy days, and listen to the drip, drip of the rain on the roof. I might even read old letters and cry over them. I was actually smelling herbs, when Jack took me down again by saying that I had forgotten to leave a place in the second story for the bath-room.

Jack then began to draw a plan, I looking over his shoulder and saying closets, every few moments. I couldn't have too many closets. There were other things which were absolutely essential, I told Jack. There must be a wide veranda, a square reception hall, oriel windows in the parlor and the study, open fire-places in every room, the stairs must stop to rest at least twice, and the sanitary arrangements must be perfect. All this must come within the figures which I gave him,

and which were not large, even after the addition had been made.

The parlor, the study, and the dining-room must have southern windows; this was another of my stipulations, and I added that a sunny kitchen would make life more pleasant and healthful for the maid. Jack at last made it clear to me that it would be necessary to have all the rooms in a "string," and he hastily drew a plan to illustrate. I told him this would not do at all, and I suggested that the study might be a wing south of the parlor and dining-room, and yet not take all the sun from either room. "The study can have the same position on the south side of the house that the reception hall has on the north," I added.

Jack sketched a plan in the form of a Greek cross, but I saw at once that it would never do.

"Put the study upstairs," he said, "then all your rooms will be sunny."

That would leave me only three chambers—one for myself, one for the maid, and one guest room. This would not do; I am a hospitable soul, and already I had "lotted" on the company I would entertain under my own roof.

"Your attic will be high; finish off one room,

and put the maid up there. The room can face the south, and be as comfortable as your own. This is the best I can do for you, Honor, for you don't want your house in a 'string,' yet you want every room to have a southern exposure. You don't like the Greek-cross plan, and no wonder. Even if it would look well, the great objection would be that you couldn't reach your study without going through the parlor or the dining-room. And I know you want your den to be as secluded as possible."

Of course I did; I would have it sound-proof if I could. My house should be my castle; my den should be my own place, where no profane foot should ever tread.

"Put the study upstairs, and the maid in the attic," I said, and Jack began to draw in earnest.

Jack and I spent several evenings over the plans before we were mutually satisfied. I suppose that specifications were never more thoroughly specified, for I knew exactly what I wanted, from SALVE over the front door to the tubs in the laundry. I have heard that Jack says he would rather undertake to build a cathedral than another house for me, but that is neither here nor there.

Of course, I received a great deal of free advice. If I had built my house to suit all my friends, especially those who had never built houses, I should have been forced to follow the example of the man who tried to please everybody and at last built his house on wheels, so that he could turn it in any direction a friend happened to wish. But I was building my house to suit myself and no one else, so I thanked all my advisers and did exactly as I pleased.

Just after I had decided on my plan, I received a letter from Uncle Jacob, enclosing a plan which he wished me to use. His house was built after it, and it had proved to be most satisfactory. If I would build mine like it he would add five hundred dollars to his gift of the lot. He didn't like to think of me spending my money on "a gimcracky house, full of corners, with no place where one could sit down and read a newspaper unless it was folded."

I knew Uncle Jacob's house, and if there was anything I didn't want it was one like his, with great, square rooms, where one couldn't be cozy, no matter how much one tried. My rooms were not to be small; I had insisted that they should be so large that I could swing a cat by the tail if

I chose, and I made calculation for a full-sized cat. So I wrote Uncle Jacob that his plan came too late, that the house was already under way. Jack told me that I should have taken the five hundred dollars and built the house upside down, if Uncle Jacob wished, but I told him that I could easily earn five hundred dollars in a house which suited me, whereas in a house which reminded me of Uncle Jacob and Aunt Maria I should never get the ghost of an inspiration. Jack seemed to think that building a house was a great undertaking.

The plan which Jack and I made between us provided for a house forty-four by twenty-eight feet. There were nine rooms, and they were of fair size, as aforesaid. Even Uncle Jacob would have no trouble with his newspaper.

At first I intended to use the room over the parlor for my study, but I coveted the view from the eastern windows for my own bed-chamber. I don't like to rise early; indeed, I am a "slug-abed," but I like to see the sun rise. Besides, I ought to sleep on the front side of the house in order to protect my property. So I decided to take the middle room for a study. There were strong points in favor of the back room, with its

western windows from which to view the afterglow, but it was best, on the whole, to take the two connecting rooms for my own use. After I decided to take the southeast room for my chamber, I saw that I could have a dressing-room by building out the second story over the porch. I had wanted a dressing-room, but I had seen no place for it. I could still have a little guest-room behind the dressing-room. It would be only ten feet wide, and fourteen feet was all that I could spare from the hall, but it would answer very well when I had need of a second guest-room.

Of course my plan provided for plenty of closets. My own room must have two, and each guest-room a good-sized one. There must be a large linen closet in the upper hall, as well as cupboards in both hall and bath-room. A large pantry must open out of the kitchen, and there must be a china closet between kitchen and dining-room. Besides these, the kitchen must be furnished with a large cupboard for shelves and drawers. The dining-room needed two corner cupboards for the display of my best china. A box-seat under the casement windows would make a convenient receptacle for books, magazines, and work-baskets. There must be a closet

in the hall, behind the stairs, for umbrellas, mackintoshes, and other wraps; here I would keep the light shawl which I might want on the porch some chilly evening, my garden hat, and many other things, so that the stairs' closet would save my taking steps.

Before a spadeful of earth was dug, I went out to view my land and decide just where the house must stand. A house which would look well in one part of Uncle Jacob's lot might look ugly in another. I took Jack with me, and we tramped over every inch of ground. At last we decided on the site, and drove stakes to mark the place.

I had a very clear idea how the interior of my house would look. Indeed, after it was done I was surprised to find how closely it resembled my mental picture of it. As I drove the stakes in the lot I saw where I would place every stick of furniture—furniture which, by the way, I had not yet purchased. I had no idea, however, how the house would look from the outside. Jack told me that it was my business to find out what I wanted, and the architect's business to find a cover for my plans. When he was ready he would submit several exteriors, and I could choose from them. This should have satisfied me, but

it didn't. The roof worried me more than anything else. Should it be hipped, renaissance, French, Gothic, or what? If Gothic, should the gables be "dubbed" off or left "perky"? But whatever the style of the roof, it must be red in color, for I had named the house "Red Roof" years before I began to think seriously of building.

If I had expected house-building to be an easy matter, I was soon undeceived. I found that there was much to be considered before I could come to my tiled fireplaces and my newel-post. *Imprimis*, should the house be of brick or of wood? Both materials have their good points, but wood is cheaper, therefore I declared for wood. What wood should be used in the interior? Could I afford hard wood, or must I content myself with painted pine? This question gave me much trouble, for if I made my house too cheap looking, I should, no doubt, be sorry for it; if, on the other hand, I spent too much on it, I might live to need that very money for bread and shoes. I decided to finish the lower rooms, with the exception of the kitchen, in what I call semi-precious woods—ash, or butternut, or in an open-grained wood, like chestnut or cypress

—preferably cypress. Of course there must be a wainscot in the dining-room. The woodwork of the upper rooms should be of white pine, finished in hard oil. The study, however, should be treated like the lower rooms.

As for floors I decided on plain "filling" for all the rooms, with the exception of the reception hall, the stairs' hall, and the stairs. These floors should be of hard wood, and as handsome as might be. I could not afford more hard-wood floors; not that the first cost frightened me so much, but I expected to keep only one maid, and I would not ask her to keep hard-wood floors as they should be kept.

One thing I insisted on, despite the advice of the architect, and that was wood ceilings. No plaster ceilings should have a place in my house. I have had three narrow escapes from falling plaster, and if I have nightmare it usually takes that form. No; my ceilings should be of wood to correspond with the woodwork of the different rooms.

It took a great deal of time to look over my mail. Everybody who had anything to sell which could possibly be used inside or outside of a house, sent me letters and circulars. Furnaces,

for instance—hot water, steam, and hot air—I had a waste-basketful of circulars about them every few days. Each furnace was the best in the market, and all the rest were humbugs.

I soon saw that I could attend to nothing but house-building, and I resigned my position as editor of *The Woman's Sphere* sooner than I had intended. I was very tired of putting my best strength into woman's pages and household departments, and I had wished for several years that I dared venture to cut loose from all this bondage and devote myself to my legitimate business, which is fiction. As soon as I had taken the decisive step, I felt relieved. I had no certain income from my pen but that derived from a weekly letter which I was under contract to furnish to a syndicate, but I did not worry about dollars and cents; I gave myself up to the joys of house-building.

The letters of the architect often contained questions which puzzled me. Why must he insist on being so technical? For instance, he asked me about the "rise" and "run" of the stairs. I took a car and went down to his office, and asked him to explain his question. He did so, and told me to try several stairs and see

which was the easiest, then to measure a step and send the dimensions to him. I did as ordered, and found that the "rise" of the stairs which I climbed with the least difficulty was six inches, and the "run" eleven. I do not like steep stairs. Stair-climbing should be a graceful, elegant motion.

I had a great many orders to give about the stairs. There must be a wide landing, half-way up, with a stained-glass window. With a window-seat, a few books, a palm, or a bit of statuary, it would make a charming little nook. I selected my baluster as carefully as if the safety of the house depended upon it, and I designed the newel-post myself.

When it came to the question of heating, I was reckless of expense. Jack told me that only one chimney would be necessary if I would give up my idea of having fireplaces in every room. I said that I wouldn't give up my fireplaces if I had to have a chimney for every room in the house; that I was building the house so I might have all the open fires I wanted. We finally settled on two chimneys, and I warmed my imagination at those fires. Of course there would be a heater in the cellar. I did not intend to freeze

in my own house; I had had enough of that in boarding-houses. I told myself that it was really more economical to have fireplaces, for in this climate a fire on the hearth often saves starting up the furnace.

The ground was broken in August, and I was assured that I could move into my house by the first of November. I began to count the weeks of boarding-house life that were to be lived through. I hope I did not patronize such of my friends as were not building houses, but I have since been told that my arrogance was almost unbearable.

CHAPTER II

I HAD intended to move into my new house on the first day of November, but masons, carpenters, plumbers, and paper-hangers lived up to their reputations, and I could not take possession till the night before Thanksgiving. I slept at a hotel that night, but in the morning, bright and early, I went over to my house. My goods had come, and the house had been cleaned, but nothing else had been done. Was I happy? I never again expect to be so happy, and I went singing about the house. There was no need for me to go to church to be thankful. I realize now that it was something of a risk to throw over a lucrative position and straightway build a house, but I was not frightened; I was as care-free as any child in the land who had received a doll's house as a present, and who did not need to think of taxes and fire insurance and similar evils.

I spent that blessed Thanksgiving Day in settling my effects, or, rather, in spreading them out, and wondering how much furniture I really must

have. I had only the few things which had furnished my two boarding-house rooms. I had not wished to buy anything till I was sure of what I wanted. Besides, the furniture which I coveted was not to be bought at any and every furniture store. It was only to be secured by rummaging old shops and interviewing collectors.

"What is home without a parlor?" I asked, as I peeped into that room. It held nothing but a piano and some packing-cases. I shut the door, telling myself that parlor furniture was out of the question for some time to come. I would entertain my friends in the study. I could make that habitable with my books. They alone would make a desert island seem like home to me. I spent a happy morning unpacking them, and, thanks to my own foresight, I had shelf-room and to spare. I had stored a case of books from time to time, as they threatened to crowd me out of my boarding-house rooms, but now my scattered family was united, and to see some volumes which had long been banished was like shaking hands with old friends. I fancied that the books themselves felt that it was good to be together again. There were books which I had not seen for so long that my taste had changed completely

during that time. Some books which had been pet ones were only ordinary books now, while others had increased in value. There was a shabby set of Shakespeare which I had bought with the first check I had ever earned by writing. I remembered it as well as if it had happened only yesterday. It was for five dollars only, but five hundred has never looked so large to me. Then, too, the source from which the check came meant a great deal to me. I had sent some little verses to a great magazine, and the great editor had printed them and paid five dollars for them. What if they were only eight lines in length, and they appeared in the back of the great magazine? They were there. I used to sit in my cold, bare little room at Uncle Jacob's and gloat over that check. It was then that I resolved that I would write; that literature should be my profession.

Uncle Jacob intended to make a teacher of me, but I was satisfied that I had no vocation for teaching, and I told him I would prefer to starve at my chosen profession. My first literary work was a cook-book, compiled at the instigation of a certain publisher to whom I applied for work. My next venture was a temperance story, a serial for the organ of a temperance society. I forget

what it was like, for I wrote it so many years ago; but if it ever kept any youth from looking upon the "wine when it is red," it is a wonder.

After that I turned out matter as fast as my pen could work. Sunday-school books I wrote by the dozen, as the row of them in the attic may testify. The religious weeklies printed hundreds of my articles upon various subjects. Then I fell upon the Woman's Page. In those days there was a great demand for that kind of material, and I made many shekels and wrought unto myself a name for saying bright things. There was nothing I did not attempt, whether it was an article on the care of children or chickens, a recipe for salt-raising bread, or a suggestion about making a cosy corner. I instructed my readers how to sweep a room, I who never did such a thing. I gave directions for washing flannels and for killing currant worms. I once wrote an article telling how to transform a parlorful of upholstered furniture into a cool summer room by the use of matting and wicker furniture. And I distinctly remember that I wrote it while sitting in a big red-plush chair in a room hung with heavy rep curtains and carpeted with a hideous red and green carpet. The thermometer,

by the way, was somewhere between ninety and a hundred.

After several years of newspaper work I grew tired of it, and I edited *The Woman's Sphere*, holding that position till I built my house and retired into Jersey. Time has proved that I did well to cut loose from routine and live my own life. I work as hard as ever when I work, but I suit myself about times and seasons. I am myself, not a mere machine. Perhaps I do not make quite as much money as when I worked for a salary, but what is money to freedom of mind? If I want to sleep half the day and work half the night it is my own affair, and I settle my own gas bills.

There has been a great deal of up-hill work, and many manuscripts have come back, "returned with thanks," since that first check was received, but as I sat in my study in my new house that Thanksgiving morning, I felt that the struggle had been worth while. I put the ragged little Shakespeares in a place of honor on my shelves, and went on with my unpacking.

I found books which carried me further back than the Shakespeare. There were prizes which I had taken when I was a little girl in short

dresses. On the fly-leaves was written "For perfect recitations" or "For regular attendance." None of these inscriptions included perfect deportment. I must have been a trial to Aunt Maria, with my demerits. There were gift-books from friends, bearing loving words from Lilian or Ella, Edith or Nell. There was room for all, even the oldest and shabbiest. It may have been silly of me, but I gave the best places to the books which had been exiled the longest. I had a perfect right to be silly under my own roof. A blue-and-gold book, worn shabby with much use, was in the bottom of one of the boxes. It was "Aurora Leigh"; I had bought it with money which Uncle Jacob had given me for winter gloves. I was sixteen then, and it was quite time that I should have "Aurora." Uncle Jacob said it was dishonest of me to use the glove money for a book, but I did not stop to think of ethics; I had begun to devour the book. I cheerfully mended my shabby gloves, glancing from my work every few moments to look at my book. Through how many foggy places in my life that book had helped me! I had often said, with white lips,

> "We'll live, Aurora! we'll be strong.
> The dogs are on us—but we will not die."

I had not seen the book in ten or twelve years, but I did not need it now; it had performed its mission. I handled it tenderly, and placed it next to Shakespeare.

As my shelves had filled I had been forced to part some of my sets, keeping the volumes which I most needed. Now my Carlyle was once more complete, to my great satisfaction. I had not been able to spare room for the "Frederick," but I could not do without "Sartor," or any of the other volumes. Carlyle always acts on me like a moral tonic, and if any one wishes to incur my displeasure, let him speak evil of "Tammas" in my house. It will take a hundred years to undo the harm which has been done through Froude's unwise editing of the letters and journals of the Carlyles. To a large mass of otherwise intelligent people Carlyle was a man who had dyspepsia and an obscure style, and whose wife was a martyr. No one who has read the very spirited correspondence of Jane Welsh Carlyle will think that she was afraid of the face of man. But there, as Cincinnatus says, I always lose my temper when I touch on this subject; it is as much of a grievance, he declares, as the obscurity of Robert Browning's poetry.

My Ruskin, too, had been separated, but now the "Stones of Venice" leaned lovingly against "Modern Painters," as if glad to be reunited. There were whole sets of books, like Scott's novels, which take up too much room, unless one has a whole house, and as I found places for all these, I promised myself a good time reading the old favorites over again.

My desk, a dear, old, roomy, ramshackle affair, had lost a leg during the process of moving, and I had to prop it with a block of wood. It had the corner I had planned for it so that the light would come over my left shoulder. I arranged all the familiar tools, and was tempted to sit down and write, but the rest of my house called me. I was a householder now, and inspiration must wait on domestic affairs.

The broad, low couch, where I always throw myself, boots and brains, when my hand gives out or my eyes are tired, had its place, also planned for it. What dreams I should have among its many pillows!

A sturdy chair, brought over from Holland, and originally the property of a Dutch burgher, had its place by the "chimney neuk." That combination of Dutch and Scotch is intended; I

am Dutch and Scotch. Some of my ancestors were Ayrshire Covenanters, and some on the Dutch side were besieged in Leyden. I am very proud of the Dutch and Scotch fighting-blood which is in my veins, and of the Puritan, also. I like to think that I come of stock which fought for conscience' sake. It always was a disappointment to me that I couldn't claim a Highland Scotch ancestor, for I should love to talk about my clan and display a tartan plaid. Anastasia, one of my best friends, who comes of Irish and New England stock, says I am greedy to want everything, and asks, how I would like to have nothing but an Irish shillelah? Anastasia and I invariably fall to talking about our "forebears"—it is as inevitable as our talking theology. We are not interested in tracking blue blood; none of our ancestors came over with the Conqueror, but we fancy that, by studying the different strains from which we come, we can better account for our own traits of character. It is race we care about, not family. But, there! I am running on about myself when I should be settling my house.

For many years I have been cumbered with much literary baggage. I don't mean books

alone, but note-books, scrap-books, and boxes and boxes of clippings and notes. I never let an idea escape me, even if I have to rise in "the dead waste and middle of the night" to put it down. Naturally, this material occupies much space, and when I planned the study I made ample provision for it. I had no time in these early days to sort this matter, so I dumped it into closets until I could classify it and put it in cabinets.

Pictures, rugs, and rocking-chairs, all found their places, and feeling that I had a place of my very own, I turned my attention to the rest of my house. The dining-room was my next point of attack. It is a pleasant room, with a blue-and-white tiled mantel of Delft design. At this time there was nothing in it but the mantel. Even I, who pride myself on my genius for making a great deal out of a little, could not make myself think that a five-o'clock tea-table, a few odd pieces of china, a spirit-lamp, and a chafing-dish could furnish forth a banqueting-hall. I simply could not endure the bareness, so I dragged the table up to the study and ate there till I unpacked my mother's china and silver and acquired some dining-room furniture.

All the chambers were entirely bare, except

mine, which held one piece of furniture, a brass bedstead. No more should I suffer the ignominy of sleeping in a folding-bed. I remembered with bitterness my many years' experience with all "makes." As I patted the shining rails of my new bed, I told myself that my days of bondage were over. There are three things which I wish never to see again—a roll-top desk, a folding-bed, and cold roast beef, that chief dish at countless boarding-house luncheons.

I had the bed, and that meant a great deal, and I made this memorandum, "Furniture for my room." In the mean time, I set about improvising a toilet-table from two packing-cases. Had I not read a hundred times how to make an elegant toilet-table from the long-suffering packing-box? I had the packing-boxes, dozens of them; I had the other essential, according to the woman's page in sundry papers—an old white muslin gown. Two precious hours I toiled over that packing-box toilet-table, but, contrary to the woman's pages, when I finished, warm and mad, with three fingers badly pounded, the result was more suggestive of two packing-boxes draped with a limp muslin flounce than of a tasteful dressing-table. However, it would do for the

present, but it would be a lesson to me. I had always suspected that barrel-chairs and packing-box furniture closely resembled the sources from which they sprung, and now I am sure of it.

Despite the set-back with the dressing-table, I was very happy as I unpacked my gowns and hung them in my closets, and put my other effects in the drawers provided for them. I kept saying to myself, "You need never move again, Honor Sharpe," and I never heard sweeter words in any language. I would have all my trunks carried up to the attic, and I would never, never go anywhere to stay over-night. This was home, and I would stay in it.

I spent a good deal of time in my own room, even tho there was no furniture in it. The closets were a delight to me, and for the first time in my life I felt that I had room enough. The crowning triumph of all was the shoe-closet. I had made the drawings with much effort, and the workmen had followed them explicitly. Talk of a shoe-bag! The shoe-closet is the best thing ever invented for feminine foot-gear. I don't want any one to suppose for a moment that I mean a closet near the floor, where one gets down and loses breath and patience in looking for a

pair of shoes which match. Not a bit of it! My shoe-closet is one of several little closets within a large closet, and it is at a convenient height from the floor, so that I can look in as I stand and pick out the shoes I want. My shoe-closet has three shelves, and each shelf has four divisions, so that each pair of shoes stands in a compartment, like a team of horses in a stall. When I told Jack what I wanted, he asked how many pairs of shoes I had. I told him that it didn't matter, I wanted room enough, and I have it. Walking-boots, dress-shoes, house-shoes, slippers, and rubbers, all found their places. "This," I said triumphantly to Jack, as I took him over the house, "this is what I meant when I harped on closets."

It was long after noon before I realized that I was hungry. The kitchen range was something of a mystery, but I conquered its slides and dampers after a while, and made bouillon, thanks to a box of "capsules," broiled some oysters, and made coffee. No banquet ever was so delicious as that simple first meal in my own house, and I pitied people with commonplace Thanksgiving dinners. I had a dainty salad, and an Indian River orange furnished my dessert.

Much refreshed by my meal, I went back to my unpacking. There were mysterious-looking boxes and bundles, whose contents I knew nothing of, they had been packed away so long. I believe that if I keep a thing for seven years I will find a use for it, and it turned out that most of these hoarded articles found their places in my domestic economy.

There was no danger that any one would call, for I had no acquaintances in town, so I rummaged all afternoon, renewing my acquaintance with all my lares and penates, and how I did enjoy it! I knew I should, and I had resolutely refused all offers of friends to come out with and help me settle. I wanted to be alone, so that I could be as silly as I pleased over my new house. For the same reason I would not secure a maid till the house had lost some of its novelty. Besides, I wanted to assure myself that I really could keep house. I had done it for many years on paper, but that proved nothing. I would get my house well in hand before I hired a maid. I had promised myself a vacation, and this was the way I would spend it.

It has always been thrown into my face that, while I may be an authority upon bookish mat-

ters, I am not practical. That remark has always been "a red rag" to me. I am nothing if not practical. How could I prove to these people that I am a good housekeeper—I who never had a house to keep, and who had to write day and night to keep a boarding-house roof over my head? Was it any fault of mine that the malign fates put me in a newspaper office instead of in a home of my own?

I have always maintained, and my own case has proved that I am right, that a woman with brains will find her bearings if she has to keep house, even if she has had little or no previous training. A business life does not unfit a woman for a domestic life. The very qualities which make her a success in business—promptness, accuracy, cool judgment—are needed in housekeeping. I love to see a bookish woman manage a home well, and the sight is not so rare as the croakers would have us believe. For many years I have studied the woman question in its various phases, and I have come to the conclusion that a woman who has earned money knows the value of a dollar better than one who has never given her nerve and brain to earn one. If I were asked by a young business man to advise him in the

choice of a wife, I would say, "Marry a business woman. She knows what your salary costs you in physical or mental force." Then, too, a woman who has brushed shoulders against the world will appreciate the shelter of a home more than one who has never known what it is to miss it.

There is much nonsense written in these latter days upon many subjects, but the business woman gets more than her share of this attention. At first there was a great hue and cry for fear her health could not stand the strain. Now the danger is that she is going to take bread from the mouths of the young men of the period. "She thinks she is smart, and she goes into business to show what she can do," is the argument I have heard from men who should know better. She does nothing of the kind; she goes into business because it pays better than teaching, and because she need not "pull wire," as she must if she wishes to keep her position as a teacher. But she does not stay in a business position one minute longer than she must. A business life is a constant "grind." After a few years nervous prostration gets hold of her, and she takes her first long vacation. After that she finds she has to rest oftener, unless she wants nervous prostration a

second time. Just what is to become of her it is too soon to tell; she is a product of this generation, and we can not get returns yet. I have often stood and watched the great army of business women pouring over the Brooklyn Bridge between five and six o'clock, and wondered what they will be doing when they are twenty years older. The idea of a stenographer of forty-five or fifty is rather incongruous. A woman can teach till she drops down with old age, but will an elderly woman be allowed to click away at a typewriter, or will she be superseded by a younger woman? I have heard more than one young woman propound this query.

But I have wandered a long way from my house. The darkness fell all too soon. I was hungry again, and very tired. I made my supper of toast and tea and jam, woman fashion. Then I rested on the lounge in the study and watched my open fire. No doubt my friends in the city were pitying me because I was lonely. I wished that they could see me by my fire—I was about to say building air-castles, but my castle was built, and it was a more substantial one. I wished they could see me, if they would go away and leave me to my thoughts and my fire.

There was one person whom I wanted with me this first evening in my own home, and that was Anastasia. But she was away, among her New England hills. At the first break in the year's work she rushes back to her hills, like the exile that she is. As I said, I could have had Anastasia with me, and my content would have been enhanced rather than lessened. I was not lonely, however, neither was I afraid. I had nothing to tempt a thief, and, besides, I sleep so lightly that if a would-be burglar so much as put his hand on my fence I should hear him. Nor do I have firearms for my protection; I am more afraid of a pistol in my own hands than of a burglar. Still, something might happen to an over-confident householder in a brand-new house. I might be taken ill, so my friends said. To satisfy them I had Mrs. Granby, the woman who cleaned my house, come to stay at night till I should have a maid to protect me. Mrs. Granby is a massive woman, who makes me think of those "mighty daughters of the plow" in "The Princess." She snored mightily, and caused me to lose much sleep, but I did not so much mind, for I employed my wakeful hours in planning about my furniture. The first night under my own roof-tree

passed safely, and I awoke ready to go on with my settling.

Of course I went all over the house to make sure that it was not a delightful dream. After the breakfast dishes were washed I sat down with a memorandum-book and made a list of the articles of furniture which were necessary to enable me to live like a civilized woman. I did not want conventional things, I wanted to rummage old shops and pick up my furniture piece by piece. Parlor furniture, bought by the "set," was not on my program.

The square reception hall was the only room besides the study which I could call furnished. It boasted an oak settle, and an old family clock which runs when so inclined. The newel-post held a wrought-iron lamp which I had picked up in an old shop in Venice ten years before, and which I had kept for this very purpose. With my stained-glass windows, and SALVE over the door, I flattered myself that my hall had quite a baronial aspect.

A trip to New York resulted in a dining-table and chairs, a couple of big, high-backed rocking-chairs, furniture for a maid's room, and kitchen pots and pans. The other necessities of life were

still to be picked up, but there need be no hurry. I had enough worldly goods to entertain the few friends whom I asked out to see me.

Anastasia was back from her shrine-visiting by this time, and she came to stay over Sunday with me. If I had expected her to rave over the house I was disappointed. She had built a house before I did—a summer cottage among the Maine lakes and hills—and she was calmly superior, as befitted an old householder. It was almost maddening to hear her give me advice, me who had written one cook-book and collaborated on another! But I felt that I could afford to be magnanimous, I who had a house which was intended for use the whole year round. I called her attention to the view from the study windows, but she asked me if I had forgotten her lake. She spoke of her mullioned windows, as if I had no oriel in my parlor. I said that my tiled mantels were much admired; Anastasia mentioned that her Dutch doors were the envy of all who saw them. My open fires reminded her that she burned pine cones on the stone fireplace in her "keeping-room." But my attic vanquished her. I took her there one rainy day, and her superiority melted away as the snow was melting un-

der the January rain. I could scarcely get her downstairs again, and all that day she was so humbled that I felt sorry for her. I could not triumph over a fallen foe, and I magnanimously asked her advice about furnishing my parlor, delicately referring to her experience. She lifted her head at once, and we were soon on the old footing, and quarreling over heredity and theology.

After steering my domestic ship for several weeks without any serious accident, I felt justified in looking about for a maid. It was quite time that I turned my house over to other hands and took up my pen, for my exchequer was getting low.

I felt quite civilized in the possession of dining-room furniture and kitchen "fixings," and I dared hope that my maid would not scorn my humble abode. Eunice, a girl from a farmhouse a few miles from town, was the first incumbent. She took the kitchen, and I retired to the study and wrote two short stories in order to get the wherewithal to buy more furniture.

The stories done and accepted, and the checks cashed, I went to New York in pursuit of furniture, and I never worked harder, not even when

making the packing-box toilet-table. To have visions of quaint cabinets and mahogany card-tables, and to find nothing but clocks and desks, when I already had those two articles, was what I called the irony of fate. The first day brought forth nothing but brass andirons and a Persian prayer rug. The second resulted in a pair of silver candlesticks, two colonial chairs, and a clothes-wringer, the last article being a commission executed for Eunice.

It was worth a great deal to see the superior air with which Eunice regarded my purchases. When she saw my colonial chairs she said, "You could have got a whole plush set for thirty-five dollars, with a mantel lambrequin throwed in." She thought her room "something like," with its ash furniture, and the dining-room "wasn't so bad," only she thought I ought to have a sideboard like her sister's. When, a few days later, I found a splendid old mahogany sideboard at a farmhouse, Eunice seemed more resigned to staying with me, tho she said it didn't touch her sister's, which cost eighteen dollars, and "the glass was extry."

Poor Eunice evidently regarded me at first as a mild sort of lunatic, who refused to eat fried beef-

steak and boiled tea, and who insisted on having soup for dinner every day, and had a mania for "greens," otherwise salads. I had to teach her to cook, for the only things she could make fit to eat were pies and cakes. As neither was to occupy an important place in my bill of fare, I put her through a course of broiling and roasting and salad-making.

The gathering of "gear" went on through the winter, till my parlor began to look like the parlor of my dreams. Now, as I sit before its wood-fire, and watch its flames flash upon the cabinet, with its old blue china—Charles Lamb would have loved my china—the open piano, the quaint yet comfortable chairs, the pictures and books, I feel that it was worth waiting for. My rugs are the envy of all my friends. They are not new ones—the rugs, I mean—but softened by time—Shiraz, Karabagh, and Saraband—and I am half ashamed sometimes, when I have an economical spell, to remember what they cost me. They were picked up one by one, long before I dared think of a house, for I knew I should need them some day. Eunice worries because I have no carpets. I think she is really interested in me, and would be glad to have my house present a good appear-

ance when she takes her friends through it when I am away.

Gradually the whole house has been furnished, and it has been a pleasure to think out the decorations, step by step. Sometimes I think that the dining-room is the prettiest room in the house. I have already mentioned my blue-and-white tiled mantel, and there is a great deal of blue in this room. I was much concerned about a place for the china and pottery which I have been collecting for many years, for I soon saw that the china-closets would not hold it. I decided to have a shelf put up three-quarters of the distance between the floor and the ceiling. This runs around three sides of the room, and gives me ample space for displaying my bowls, plates, and jugs. Under this shelf is a cupboard—a strip of handsome wood—furnished with tiny brass hooks, where I hang my cups and pitchers, especially the latter. I have over seventy pitchers, of all kinds and prices, from the blue-and-white striped one which I picked up the other day for fifteen cents, up to the old Delft one which was given me by a kindly mevrouw when I was last in Holland. I never cared to collect teapots; they do not appeal to me as pitchers do. Collecting candlesticks is another

of my fads. I have a great many; among them is a dainty alabaster one, brought from Pisa by a friend; a silver one from an old Venetian palace; sturdy brass ones, used for many generations in the Sharpe family; and all sorts of modern ones, valuable or otherwise. I always carry a candle up to my room at night, tho the gas is burning brightly in the hall.

I have a mania for collecting china. If I had to earn my living by anything besides writing I would collect china for the purpose of selling it. It would be an ideal existence to go driving about the country during the summer, picking up the china, and then in winter to have a cosy little shop in which to display one's treasures. Of course, one would have to know one's business, in order to make it a paying matter. Probably if I bought the china I should fall in love with it and want to keep every piece, so I should not grow rich very fast.

The guest-rooms are comfortable and inviting, and my room is what one's own room should be, with its broad white bed, its low couch—I have one in every room, for I consider it a means of grace—its square, solid table, its big, hospitable rocking-chair, all toilet necessities, a pier-glass—

a positive necessity if one aims to be a well-dressed woman—and the shelves of pet books which one might want in the night.

Altogether, the little house is a joy. There are few articles of real money value in it, but some of the things are priceless through their associations, and everything is harmonious. I have always heard that in order to build a satisfactory house it is first necessary to build one as an experiment. I have found that this is not the case. My house suits me as its shell suits a snail. Every day I love it better, and I feel that it is my castle. Oh, it is a great thing to be under one's own roof!

CHAPTER III

How old must a woman be before she can with propriety live alone in a house built with her own money? I asked myself the question when I was nicely settled and the domestic machinery was in good running order. That I didn't need a chaperon and wouldn't have one, I was decided. Neither would I share my house with another woman. No house can be large enough for two families. I would have company much of the time, and I had a certain widowed aunt in mind when I furnished the larger guest-room. Indeed, Aunt Frances was welcome to spend half her time with me if she chose, but the idea of a chaperon was ridiculous. I, Honor Sharpe, fat and forty, if not fair—I who had traveled alone all over my own country and Europe, should be able to take care of myself. There! it is out. My age, I mean. But why should I hesitate to put down the date as recorded in Grandma Sharpe's family Bible? "Honoria Mary Sharpe, born April 15, 1861." I never could see why a woman

should be ashamed of her age. A man isn't, except in very rare cases. Another proof of the superiority of the "sterner sex," Cincinnatus would say.

Now that I have told so much about myself I may as well tell more. I said that I am forty; worse yet, I am somewhat inclined to—I'll call it *embonpoint*—and weigh eleven "stone" by the scales at the corner grocery. I am a trifle gray, and have a few "crow-tracks" at the corners of my eyes, brought there, no doubt, by much thinking of my "whens and hows."

My name is an apt one, perhaps, for people say I am as sharp as vinegar at times. I don't mind saying that my bark is worse than my bite. As for my other name, Honor, I hope I live up to it. It isn't a pretty name, but it might have been worse. When I think of names which Grandma Sharpe might have given me, I am thankful for my mercies. I have never tried to change Honor to Helen or any other beautiful name, after the manner of some unfortunates. If my friends don't like my name they invent one which suits them. For instance, Anastasia usually calls me Torpenhow, or shortens it to Torp. She signs herself Dick. She has used these names ever

since I introduced her to Kipling, and she read "The Light that Failed." She says it is the best story of a friendship since David and Jonathan.

I have been told that some people call me proud and cynical, but I am neither. That I am "peculiar" I will admit. I am not a gregarious being, and, except to people whom I like, or have good reason to think I shall learn to like, I am "peculiar," with malice aforethought. It is the easiest way to get rid of undesirable acquaintances. I hate tea-drinkings and sewing societies, also church sociables, and I don't intend to learn to like them. When I came here I took a pew in one of the churches, for I always go to church once every Sunday, whether it rains or shines. I was at once besieged by the women of that church to join this organization and that, and to work in the church. I told them politely but firmly that I was the busiest of women, that my time was money, that I would give to the church of my choice as liberally as possible, but that I would not attend the sewing society. One woman suggested something about duty. She won't do it again. I haven't lived forty years, with a conscience in good working order, without knowing my duty. Why should I bake a cake for the

church afternoon tea, or have my maid bake one, which amounts to the same thing? One woman called me stingy because I refused a cocoanut cake when Eunice was midway in her ironing, but she omitted to say that I gave her a dollar with which to buy a cake.

I can stand up in church and sing with truth, "I love thy kingdom, Lord," and I am in sympathy with the cause of missions, and I remember it in a substantial way, but I can't wear a Japanese costume and sell fans at a church fair. Yet I have been criticized for not doing it. To my mind St. Peter is a good authority on church matters, and he wrote of ministering "as of the ability which God giveth." I am sure my work is not to be done at church fairs. There are women who do such things gracefully; let them do it and leave me in peace.

And there is the Club. I spell it with a capital, for I have great respect for that club, even if I don't join it. That was another offense, my refusal to let my name be "put up." I believe in clubs with all my heart, but I do not care for a club where I am expected to read papers or hear other women read them. I read and study more than is good for me, and when I go to my club I

want to be entertained or left in quiet. A club to a busy woman of my sort should mean a place where one can relax and have a good time. If it is in town it should be a place where one can write letters and notes when one drops in. There ought also to be rooms where one can change one's gown. This would be a boon for suburbanites who wish to dress for a dinner or for the theater. Many of the club women I know are overworked. I know whereof I speak, for they often write to me, asking me to plan a course of study. And they ask questions which no one but a specialist could answer. "You are a literary woman," they say, "you have a large library, and have access to the New York libraries. It won't be any trouble to help, will it?" I am too weak-minded to refuse, so after many hours of hard work I send the program, and the Club adopts it. I tremble as I read it over, and rejoice that I need not hear the papers.

Or, perhaps some friend tells me her subject and asks for data. I couldn't handle the subject, but I look up authorities, and tell her what books to get. She gets them, and writes her paper, and feels that she has done her duty toward her day and generation. How much better for those

women to meet and have a cup of tea and listen to some music, or a talk by some outsider, or to chat together in a natural way about the subject they are studying! When I explained my idea of a club to the president of the most influential one in this town, she looked at me in a lofty fashion, and said, "I knew that you are a literary woman, and we expected a great deal when you came among us. I have read your books, and enjoyed them, but I am surprised, to be plain, at your ideas about a club."

She was surprised, and I did not mind her saying it. That woman is president of one club and secretary of another. She teaches in the Sunday-school and conducts a sewing-class for poor children. She "keeps up" her music, and reads Dante in the original. She paints in water-colors and embroiders center-pieces which she gives to the church fair. Besides all this, she is on a committee for improving the streets of the town, and is interested in school-room decoration and the establishment of free kindergartens, to say nothing of having a husband and several children, all of whom receive a fair share of her attention. When I see one of these women I feel that I must be a very indolent person.

Of course, Mrs. President thinks that I am lazy. I know that I lowered myself in her estimation when I ventilated my views on clubs. I am sure she suspects that I read my Dante by means of a translation. Perhaps she thinks I couldn't write a paper for the Club. Perhaps I couldn't—at any rate I don't mean to try.

It is evident that I shall not be popular in this town, notwithstanding Uncle Jacob's offer to introduce me to everybody. He thinks that the P. P. P. I. is a hall-mark of blue blood; I shouldn't be surprised if he went abroad and married a duchess, now that Aunt Maria is dead. People have called on me, and I have returned their calls within a week, but I have not gotten beyond a formal acquaintance. I never hurry to make friends, for I feel that I am sure to be drawn to those I need and those who need me. Still, there are many people in this little city well worth knowing, and I mean to know them when the time comes. Meantime, I am not lonely. One of my reasons for building this house was that I might "slam the door in the face of nauseous intruders," as Carlyle used to say. Can't I understand him? Blessed be little Jeannie Welsh for her sound-proof room. I have often wished for one.

Tho I may have painted myself as a sort of an eccentric, I have friends, and I am thankful for them. They are people for whom I would go through fire and water, if need be. Some of them will be met in these pages. I have mentioned Anastasia; I am apt to mention her. We never make any fuss over each other, and when we are separated I write to her less frequently than to many for whom I have much less regard. As I often tell her, it is not necessary for me to write to her in order to let her know that I care about her. If I were to describe our relations I should use Browning's words, "What a thing friendship is, world without end."

And there is Cincinnatus. Of course his name isn't Cincinnatus, but I choose to call him so. It is the name he used to sign to his newspaper articles. Anastasia says there is nothing bucolic about him, and she can't see why I should call him Cincinnatus, when Tilgath-pileser would be just as appropriate. Cincinnatus is a bachelor, and he frequently leaves his own fireside of an evening and comes to mine. I am a charitable soul, and I give him a cup of good coffee and the easiest chair. We have been friends for twelve years, ever since we first worked together

on a newspaper. He was the musical and dramatic critic, and I edited the woman's page. When I lived—I mean boarded—in New York he spent about three evenings of each week with me, and when I moved to Jersey he came out every Sunday afternoon. After a few months he decided that he wanted to become a suburbanite, so he bought the house next mine, and established a cousin of his, a vinegary female of sixty or so, as housekeeper. Cincinnatus's house is more ornate than mine, but it doesn't begin to be as comfortable. Would-be suburbanites invariably point out his house to each other, a fact which he never fails to report to me. My house suits me exactly, and I don't care whether other people like it or not; but Cincinnatus is vain, I fear.

His furniture is grander than mine, but I am not envious, for there is a story to most of my belongings. His study would drive me mad, with its prim leather chairs and its massive library table. Everything is so hopelessly "to rights" that I should never have the shadow of an inspiration if I had to work in such a room.

Cincinnatus had a family. I suppose I should spell the word with a capital F. He has a num-

ber of old family portraits which hang in the halls and in the drawing-room. I call my best room a parlor; Cincinnatus calls his the drawing-room. The portraits glower at one till I am thankful that my ancestors were such ordinary people that they did not think of having their portraits painted.

But Cincinnatus has other treasures—priceless old books, a whole case of them, for he is a regular bibliomaniac. I don't pretend to collect old books, it is too expensive a fad. Pitchers are much cheaper. However, it does not so much matter what one collects, so long as one has a collection of any kind.

I am never quite sure whether Cincinnatus and I are good friends, or whether we like to be together because we enjoy fighting. We seem to need each other, and our disputes serve to break up the monotony of our existence.

I am well aware that the neighbors are curious about Cincinnatus and me. I suppose they think that we must be especially interested in each other because he comes here so much. Poor man, if he knew it he wouldn't cross my threshold again, and I should miss him if he were to stay away. I am nice to Cincinnatus—that is,

usually. I allow him to smoke in my parlor, with total disregard for my curtains, and I give him advice on all subjects. On a few points we agree, but our taste in music and literature is diametrically opposite. His library is full of the prim and stilted books of the Queen Anne period, while my shelves groan under a heterogeneous collection, ranging from Homer to Haggard. I adore Kipling, but Cincinnatus never hears his name without a desire to indulge in profanity. Another rock on which our friendship splits is the poetry of Robert Browning. While I am very, very fond of Browning, and I read him without a glossary, tho Cincinnatus declares that I don't, I do care for other authors. Indeed, I don't read Browning half as much as Cincinnatus thinks I do. Still, that is no reason why I should not keep a bookmark in "The Ring and the Book," and leave it in Cincinnatus's favorite chair. Speaking of Browning, I am naturally reminded of Wagner, whom I call the Browning of music. Or, I might say that Browning is the Wagner of poetry. There are three men whom I group together, and I find it impossible to think of one without thinking of the others—Wagner, Browning, and Carlyle. I am apt to play Wagner with

the window open toward Cincinnatus's study. His window invariably comes down with a bang.

There is an old saying that two of a trade never agree. Cincinnatus is one of the scribbling folk, and so am I. He need not write for bread and shoes, so he spends months polishing an essay. Meantime I have written a novel to keep the roof over my head. But I dare say I should write whether there was need of it or not; there is no denying that I have *cacoethes scribendi* in its worse form. I should write, even if no publisher would print my wares, and I had to throw them into the kitchen grate. Give me plenty of smooth paper, a broad-nosed pen, and a bottle of black ink, and I am perfectly happy. I don't use a typewriter; I tried it, and found that it was a non-conductor. Cincinnatus finds it very helpful, and does much of his work upon one. I write a big, square hand, which looks legible, but I am told it is the despair of compositors. Cincinnatus swears that he never makes out more than two words out of every three. I believe him, for not long since I sent by him for some worsted for Aunt Frances, who was in a great hurry to finish some crocheted slippers. It was raining, and Cincinnatus obligingly dropped in and asked if he could

do anything for me. I thanked him, and gave him the following commission, not stopping to decipher it for him: "Three skeins of bottle-green worsted." What he brought back was three bottles of Worcestershire sauce.

Aunt Frances, who is a matchmaker, used to remark every day or two that Cincinnatus would make a good husband. Since the episode of the Worcestershire sauce, however, she has said less about his eligibility for the marital state. I don't "lay up" any of these little mistakes against Cincinnatus. He is helpful to me in many ways, and, for my part, I return all the favors I accept. A single man is a helpless creature, even when he has as efficient a housekeeper as Cincinnatus's cousin makes him.

How I have "run on" about myself, and yet there is very little to tell, with all my egotism to aid me. To-night it seems to me that I have lived a meager life. So many years have gone in a hand-to-hand struggle for bread, that now when I can afford a little of what once would have seemed luxury, I ask myself if it has not come too late. After all, it is only an old maid's story that I am telling.

Am I sorry or glad that I never married as

other women did? Should I be a better woman if "a manly form" sat opposite me, and a troop of children slept in their little beds upstairs? On the whole, I am by no means certain that I can call up any regret for what was not to be. Sometimes, when I have poked my fire, and it is burning its brightest, and I sit toasting my feet, I think of possible slippers which might have been on the fender beside mine, and I start to say,

> "My Father thou hast knowledge, only thou,
> How dreary 'tis for women to sit still
> On winter nights by solitary fires
> And hear the nations praising them far off."

But, to be frank, I have never heard much about the nations praising me far off, or near by, for that matter. I would rather have them buy my books than praise me, for I am a mercenary creature, and I prefer shekels to pleasant reviews. And as for being solitary, that is what I built this house *for*, as Eunice would say.

When people ask why I never married, for people—it's usually one's relatives—do ask such brutal questions, I tell them that I have never felt able to support a husband. It is easily said, it sounds smart and flippant, and it has the effect of silencing the questioner unless she—it

always is a woman—is unusually persistent. But it is a silly answer; most women do not support their husbands. However, one must say something when asked a leading question. I am put into the witness-box by one or another of my relatives every time a new book appears with my name on the title-page. Something in it is sure to strike somebody as being autobiographical. I often smile while writing, and imagine some one saying, "Now whom does she mean by that? Didn't she 'go' with so and so about 1840?" It is annoying, even if one is able to laugh at it.

Even more maddening than the inquisitive friend, is the one who takes it upon herself to explain why I never married. As Charlotte Brontë once wrote to Thackeray, "I can defend myself from my enemies, but heaven save me from my friends." I feel this when some well-meaning married woman tells me what she told some one who was asking questions about me. Sometimes she explains that I have not married because I dislike men. I don't. I like them, and in some cases I love them. I can't say, as Mr. Snevellicci said about the ladies, "I love 'em, every one," but I object to being put down as a

man-hater. They "average up" as well as women, and I shall be sorry if the time ever comes when I have no good friends on the other side. It is good for a woman to have a friendship with a man; there is a strength about it which she needs. Such a friendship as I mean was not possible in "the good old times" when every man was looked upon as a possible husband. We have grown wiser, and there is less self-consciousness in the attitude of young men and women than there was a generation ago.

Sometimes the officious friend explains why I am not married by saying that I have my mind on other matters, and I do not care for domestic things. I do care for domestic things, and the very heresy which I am always fighting is that bookish women are not normal women. But when I say to these well-meaning people, "Oh! why did you say that? Why did you not let the matter drop?" they reply that they weren't going to have people think that I couldn't have married if I had wanted to.

But why do I bring all this up to-night? I have always laughed at old maids, poor pathetic things, living over a vanished youth, hinting broadly of some old love-affair—"I could tell an' I

list." So could I, but I will not be sentimental, not even over my solitary fire.

Having a moderate income, a way of adding to it, my books and my house, and Cincinnatus to quarrel with, I fail to see that I need anything. In one of the letters of Charlotte Brontë, are the following words, which express my idea so much better than I can say it:

"I speculate much upon the character of unmarried and never-to-be-married women nowadays, and I have already got to the point of considering that there is no more respectable character on this earth than an unmarried woman who makes her own way through life quietly, perseveringly, without support of husband or father, and who, having attained the age of forty-five or upward, retains in her possession a well-regulated mind, a disposition to enjoy simple pleasures, fortitude to support inevitable pains, sympathy with the sufferings of others, and willingness to relieve want so far as means extend."

CHAPTER IV

My lot, for which I must thank Uncle Jacob, was the site of an old house, and, consequently, my lawn and trees were ready for me when my house was built. This I felt to be a great advantage, for what would the country be without trees? If I had to wait for them to grow I might die of old age before receiving any benefit from them. Of course I knew from the first time I set eyes on my lot that there were trees on it, but I did not know how beautiful they would be that first spring-time in my own home. There were elms, my favorite tree, by the way—"ellums," Uncle Jacob had called them; also a white birch, a poplar or two, three magnolias, and a mountain ash, which I like to call my rowan tree, and which makes my "yard" beautiful in the autumn.

I watched for the spring more eagerly than ever that year, for I was no longer a slave to office hours, and I could take my fill of its delights. The coming of the first blue-bird was a

signal for me to lay aside my pen and listen. There was a tiny grove near my house, so I would have birds enough. I would arm myself with an opera-glass and study birds as carefully as Anastasia herself. Her teaching kept her from her New England springs, but I was determined that she should share my delight in a spring-time in Jersey. So one Friday evening I sent her this message:

"Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.
"For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.
"The flowers appear on the earth, and the time of singing birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land."

Anastasia received the note before breakfast, and she was on hand at ten o'clock. By the way, she is a genuine out-of-doors woman, and she can do what I can't do—write out-of-door papers. They smell of the upland pastures and "the pointed firs." Ever since I have known her intimately enough to read her manuscripts, I have urged her to gather her out-of-door papers together and make a book. I should be prouder of it than of any of my novels. I feel the beauty in nature, but I can not put it in words. If I were to describe a morning afield I should probably say that there was a pasture of clover, with

a stone wall around it and a blue sky overhead. Anastasia would describe it so that one could smell the clover and see the clouds shifting in the sky.

My Scriptural message was intended to summon Anastasia to help me in my gardening. But first we would make a bonfire. It was just the morning for a bonfire, and I would make one, assisted, of course, by Anastasia. It was fully fifteen years since I had had the pleasure of making a bonfire, and nothing, not even the speech of my neighbor women, should cheat me out of this delight.

Eunice looked up in surprise when she saw Anastasia and me in short skirts and armed with rakes. "Lawsy, Miss Sharpe, I'll do that myself rather than have you do it. Just wait till I get my Saturday's work done."

It took me some time to make her understand that Anastasia and I really wanted to make our own bonfire. She went back to her kitchen, saying, "Well, the ways of writin' folks is queer."

Anastasia and I had a beautiful time that morning. The leaves had not been raked up in the fall, and now they were huddled in fence corners and around the roots of trees. We soon

collected a large pile, and had the fire burning famously. There is no color in the world so beautiful as the orange-red which one sees in a flame. A nasturtium comes nearest to it.

Something in the spring air brought Cincinnatus out, and he came to the fence to offer his assistance. His yard is much more pretentious than mine, so perhaps he is justified in speaking of it as "my grounds." He had twice as much land as I had, which was more than I could bear, but I have since added to my possessions. I refused Cincinnatus's offer of assistance, but I told him that I wanted his advice about my garden. For I would have a garden, even if it was no larger than a pocket-handkerchief. There should be a kitchen garden with vegetables and herbs, and a flower-garden as well. All the flowers should be old-fashioned ones—pinks and bachelor-buttons and four-o'clocks and sweet-william and ribbon-grass and hollyhocks. Cincinnatus showed me the plan of his garden, but I scorned anything so regular and modern. Mine should be in a delightful tangle. Cincinnatus thought that he would have a greenhouse after a while, and he talked in a lordly manner of other improvements. A stable he must have. He had owned a saddle

horse for years, and now that he was in the country he had invested in a handsome pair of cobs. I didn't want a greenhouse, but I decided right then and there that I would have a horse.

I said nothing to Anastasia about the horse, for I knew she would scold me for my extravagance. We went back to the flower-beds, I feeling rather guilty in the possession of my secret. Pete, the man whom Cincinnatus had hired to make our gardens, came when he was ready and worked under our directions. Cincinnatus came over and advised about everything. Anastasia thought that he gave me too much advice, and that it was almost as bad as being married. I assured her that I did not mind in the least, and that I never adopted Cincinnatus's suggestions unless it suited me perfectly to do so. I reminded her also that I gave him far more advice than I took.

Anastasia and I went in to luncheon with ravenous appetites for Eunice's chicken *pâtés* and waffles. After luncheon we went for a walk and found the first violets. A soft spring rain began to fall before we reached home, but we did not mind it in the least. Anastasia said it was very much like a New England shower, and I felt

Something in the spring air brought Cincinnatus out, and he came to the fence to offer his assistance

proud for New Jersey. She assured me that a wetting from such a shower never gives one a cold if, instead of changing them, one sits down and dries one's skirts before an open fire. Accordingly, after the violets were put in water, Anastasia and I sat down before the study fire, instead of changing our damp skirts. It was a risky thing to do at our age, and I am glad to say that we did not take cold. Anastasia protests against this reference to our age, in these days of young women of fifty.

The evening was cool enough to give an excuse for a wood fire in the parlor. Cincinnatus came over soon after dinner. He had been to New York that afternoon, and he brought me a pot of daffodils from Thorley's. I could not help quoting Wordsworth as I took them and thanked him. The quotation pleased him, for Wordsworth is one of his worthies. He remarked, as he settled himself in his favorite chair, that he had spent most of the afternoon browsing in old book-shops.

"And, I dare say, your purse is lighter in consequence," I said, as I placed the daffodils on a small table where they could show off to the best advantage.

"No; the treasures were beyond me. There was a folio Beaumont and Fletcher which Charles Lamb would have bought if he had had to wear his threadbare brown suit another year. I wanted it, but I felt that I must punish myself for my extravagance in buying that 'Areopagitica.'" Cincinnatus did not look as if he were grieving over his extravagance.

He seldom comes over when Anastasia is with me, for, I regret to say, they are not good friends. I hoped that we might have an amicable evening, but it did not take them long to get into a quarrel over Kipling. It was during this passage-at-arms that Anastasia said the worst thing she could possibly have said to a man like Cincinnatus —that he lacked a sense of humor. He especially prides himself upon that quality. I was sorry for him, almost as sorry as I was when I told him, during an argument a few days before, that he jumped at a conclusion.

The battle began when Cincinnatus took a book from one of his coat-pockets, and, remarking that he had been reading "the great and only," put it on the table near which he sat. It was certain "Ballads."

Anastasia rarely takes up a general challenge

like that, and there would have been no "feud," as some of my forebears would have said, if Cincinnatus — I don't know whether he meant to be provoking or conciliatory, or whether he was simply curious; every normal man is that —had not appealed directly to her, saying, "I believe you are an admirer of Kipling, Miss Winthrop."

"I enjoy him immensely," she replied.

"Ah! that's the thing," said Cincinnatus, foolishly. "Now, I wish I could get up an enthusiasm for an author who is popular and who is still alive and doing the thing the public likes. There must be a delightful stimulus in wondering what he is going to do next."

"Oh, there is," said Anastasia. "Quite like *The Fireside Companion* serials."

"I'm afraid that all the writers I care about are dead," Cincinnatus went on, innocently.

Now I knew that Cincinnatus was not boasting of his classical tastes; that he was, in fact, half poking fun at himself for being old-fogyish.

Anastasia probably did not know this. At all events, she said with suspicious meekness, "I fancied that you did not like live ones."

Cincinnatus was childish enough to be a little

nettled at this. One often is at being told the truth. He said with dignity, "'The Recessional,' of course, is a fine poem."

Cincinnatus always makes a concession with an exasperating air of not liking to differ with a lady. At least, I used to think it exasperating; now I find an Old-World flavor in it which I rather like, especially as I feel myself able to differ manfully if I choose.

Anastasia, evidently, has not acquired a taste for the flavor; besides, she hates to have people over-praise "The Recessional." She thinks the Philistine likes it too well, and Kipling has done better work. She said flippantly that she preferred "Tommy" and the "barricks."

Cincinnatus was so shocked that he hastened to turn the subject, saying that his taste might be old-fashioned, but he confessed to a liking for sound suited to sense.

Anastasia's eyebrows moved. She thinks that Kipling suits sound to sense better than any one since Keats, and in a much wider field.

Cincinnatus went on courageously, quoting Pope's famous "Ajax strives," etc. "That is perfect of its kind."

"Yes," said Anastasia judicially. Her ear for

English is too good to let her despise the lines, but she hates their kind. "So, I believe, were the wigs and waistcoats of the period."

"Oh, but that isn't quite fair," said Cincinnatus, like a great boy. "Don't you really like poetry to be poetical in its matter as well as in its manner? Are not Ajax and Camilla and even the medieval robber gentry, a little better company than Tommy This and Billy That?"

"Possibly, if we were limited to one or two classes of society in our selection of heroes and heroines. I like all kinds myself. There is a great deal of low life in Shakespeare, for instance."

"You can hardly argue from that," said Cincinnatus; and I hastened to add that Shakespeare is, like Scripture, nearly always equally effective on the side of the enemy.

So far, Cincinnatus had been admirably good-tempered, but when he confessed to a distaste for "Tomlinson," Anastasia said that a sense of humor was necessary to an appreciation of its tragedy, and the vicious little half-truth in the slur went home and made him sulky.

I interfered by telling the combatants that they were rivaling the famous Dickens and

anti-Dickens controversy in "Cranford." Cincinnatus was really more to blame than Anastasia, but what is to be done when one's best friend and one's only true neighbor do not harmonize?

CHAPTER V

After I had once decided that I wanted a horse, nothing but a horse would satisfy me. I could not afford even an ex-car horse, which Eunice told me could be bought for fifteen dollars. A sensible woman, a good financier, would have waited till she had paid for her house, but I reasoned that if I waited a year or so I might stop wanting a horse. I would have all the good things of life when I wanted them most. If the proceeds of my writing failed to meet my expenses, there were boarders to be had.

Accordingly, I asked Cincinnatus to look out for a horse for me. He supposed that I wanted "a safe lady's-horse." I told him that I wanted nothing of the kind; I wanted a horse with plenty of spirit and style. Cincinnatus opened his memorandum-book and wrote: "Mem. Horse for Honor. Dark bay. Spirited and stylish. Price no object."

It was a common occurrence after that for Cincinnatus to drive up with a horse for me to try.

I was not easily suited. Sometimes I was not able to tell why I did not like a horse, but I knew when I did not like it; and the weeks went by, and I either walked or borrowed one of Cincinnatus's horses. He said there was no sense in my buying one, for I was perfectly welcome to his. But I am no borrower—besides, I wanted my own horse.

We had exciting times that spring. Sometimes we would hear of a desirable horse at some distance, and then we would take the train and go to investigate. We were always disappointed, at least I was. I know that Cincinnatus was provoked at me for being so hard to suit. Sometimes I would tell him not to bother, that I was competent to buy my own horse, but he always took me down by saying that I would get cheated if left to myself. We would part with much dignity on both sides, and nothing would be said about a horse for several days. After a while Cincinnatus would come over and say that he had heard of the very horse which I had been looking for. I would jump into my hat and jacket, and we would drive ten or twelve miles into the country, to find a horse for which I would not give ten dollars. My writing languished, for I could

not settle down to work with that horse on my mind.

At last I found one quite by accident—or, rather, Eunice's "company" found it for me. He told her one Sunday evening of a horse which was just the thing for me, so far as looks went, but he doubted if a woman could manage her. To quote Eunice's own words, she couldn't stand that from a man who had taken her driving "and got run away with twice." She told him that if I could drive Mr. King's cobs I could drive any horse he could find. She made a few more inquiries, then summoned me.

The "company" was inclined to be patronizing. He knew of a horse, but he doubted if it could be bought at any "figger" that I would want to give. He seemed to like the sound of the word "figger," and he managed to repeat it several times, till Eunice told him that the "figger" was none of his business, and if he knew where the horse was to be seen to say so and be done with it.

He gave me the most minute directions for finding her owner's house, and added that I would better take a man along. Eunice took him down

again by saying that I had driven horses when he wore dresses. She had a hard mouth, he said —not Eunice, but the horse. I thanked him and left the kitchen. As I passed through the dining-room I heard Eunice telling him that he ought to know better than to be so forth-putting with me—that I was not an ordinary woman, but I wrote books for my living. The young man replied that writing books had nothing to do with buying a horse, which was true.

Cincinnatus and I started early next morning. He was not hopeful, poor man; he had neuralgia, and, besides, looking for horses had lost some of its zest during all these weeks. But I was confident that our long quest was at an end.

It was a drive of seven miles through a mist that was fast developing into a rain. I urged Cincinnatus to go back, but he said he would not let me go alone. When we reached the place we found the owner just starting out with the horse, a trim-built, stylish little bay. My heart went out to her at once. She should be mine, figger or no figger.

Cincinnatus, too, was impressed. "She's a beauty," he said, "but don't be too eager, or the man may raise on his price. She has a good

head, but I fear she is too full of mettle for you, Honor."

I reminded Cincinnatus that I was of age, and was buying a horse, not an excuse for one. We alighted, the owner came up, and negotiations began. Cincinnatus and I got into the other buggy, and I drove away. I was delighted, and after I was satisfied, I gave the reins to Cincinnatus, and asked him to try my new horse.

"Why, Honor, she almost pulls my hands off," he exclaimed, after a few minutes.

"Nonsense," I said, "I never drove a horse more easily. Let me have the reins again." I took them, and smiled at Cincinnatus in triumph; I passed them back to him, and he made the same complaint.

"Have her if you want her," he said, giving the reins back to me, "but I wouldn't drive her if you would give her to me. She would pull my arms off my shoulders in five miles. You would better take her on approval; she may have her drawbacks. It is a case of love at first sight with you, and you would better think it over. Let me talk for you, please."

I sat and held the little horse, while Cincin-

natus negotiated. Presently the two men came up to the buggy.

"Oh, it will be all right, Mr. King. I know you by sight, and I've known you longer by reputation. You literary folks are good for the horse. Take her home and try her, and if you don't like her let me know in the course of a few days."

I didn't wait to hear any more, but drove the new horse toward home, leaving Cincinnatus to follow if he chose. I let Bonnie, for that was her name, choose her own pace, and I led Cincinnatus a race for two or three miles. When at last he drove beside me, he seemed quite anxious, and he inquired if the horse had gotten beyond my control. I assured him that Bonnie and I understood each other already.

Eunice was almost as pleased with the horse as I was. As she said, she felt a peculiar interest, because she was purchased upon her "young man's" recommendation. She was proud of me, too, for paying such a "figger."

The truth is, that my place in the country, as Anastasia declares I call it, was getting to be expensive. It would be necessary to keep a man to take charge of the lawn, the garden, and the

horse, and this was an expense I had not counted upon when I began to be a householder. Then, too, I had to have a stable. Cincinnatus came to the rescue; he hurried the building of his stable, and I rented a stall of him. Pete was engaged to take charge of both places, and I breathed a sigh of relief.

My garden made, my horse in the stable, my next duty was to "set up" a dog. I have always been a lover of dogs, but I would not be guilty of keeping one shut up in a boarding-house. Now I must have a dog without delay. Cincinnatus was interested, of course, and he inquired what sort of a dog I wanted, adding that he was glad to know what to give me for a birthday present. I told him that I did not want a big dog for protection, nor did I want a lap-dog. What I did want was a nice, comfortable dog, whom —I hate to say "which" about a nice dog— I should like to have about. "Just as you have your cat," I added, and Cincinnatus said he understood.

He adores cats, while I hate them. I wouldn't, of course, let a cat suffer or go hungry, but I should as soon think of petting a pig. To tell the truth, I dislike to have cats about me, and

my antipathy has nothing to do with the fact that old maids and cats are usually spoken of together. Tartarus, Cincinnatus's black cat, lives on his writing-table, and follows him about like a dog. I must own that I never see that cat without a little shiver running down my spine. I believe I am more than half afraid of Tartarus. I suppose that is the reason he spends so much of his time sitting on my dining-room window-ledge. There is something uncanny about the beast. At luncheon time he seldom fails to be there, eying every mouthful I eat. I used to sit facing the window, but I had my place changed so I could not see the cat. Eunice frequently "shoos" him away with a broom, but he always comes back again and remains there till he sees Cincinnatus take his place at the study table. Then Tartarus jumps up to the ledge of the study window; Cincinnatus lets him in, and he jumps on the desk, walking over the papers till he makes himself perfectly comfortable.

My dog came to me of "his own accord," as Eunice said. I was locking the front door one dark, rainy night, when I heard a most pitiful whine. I opened the door, and a collie, the very dog I was looking for, crept in. He did every-

thing but speak, but speech was not necessary. He managed to ask me to let him stay, and I did. I took him to the kitchen and fed him cold roast beef, till Eunice spoke up in behalf of the matutinal hash. She was rather shy of the dog, tho she admitted that he was a beauty. We wondered what his name could be, and we tried all the dog names we had ever heard, but he did not seem to know any of them. "I shall call him Laddie," I said, stooping to pat him. "He is Scotch, and the name fits him. He is so intelligent that he will soon know it."

I took him to the study, and he made directly for the hearth rug, and lay down as if he belonged there. I wished that he did, but I felt that I must advertise him. I did so the very next day; much as I wished to keep him, I did all in my power to give him back to his owner, but no one claimed him, and I joyfully adopted him. He was Laddie, and, as Eunice said, he "belonged."

My dog seemed to afford Buttons, Cincinnatus's dog, much amusement. Buttons is a fox terrier, the last dog one would expect Cincinnatus to have. He would naturally have a greyhound or a King Charles spaniel. Buttons is a

stylish dog, with the air of a man-about-town. He evidently thought he could impress Laddie by his manner, but Laddie regarded him through the pickets without betraying any admiration, and only a listless interest. Buttons then became critical, and he barked at the collie as if he meant to express his disapproval of anything from the Kailyard, from dogs up to literature. Laddie was not humbled by this new treatment, and gradually the two dogs became very good friends. Buttons takes Laddie about with him, and, I dare say, introduces him to the other dogs in the neighborhood as a very good fellow from the country.

It was quite time that I went to work again in earnest. I was enjoying my belongings too well, while my exchequer was getting low. The dust was gathering on a half-finished story, and I was under contract to furnish it at a certain time, which was drawing near. I planned a rigorous program. I would work faithfully every morning, and for two hours after luncheon. I would go for a drive at four, come home at five, and lie down for an hour, then I would dress for my half-past six o'clock dinner. In the evening I would "keep up" my music, or read something

solid when I did not play chess with Cincinnatus or talk to him. I did not keep a record of those spring evenings, but it is safe to say that I talked to Cincinnatus, or listened while he talked to me, more than I read or practised.

CHAPTER VI

I HAVE ceased to wonder why housekeepers talk so much about their servants. No wonder it is an endless theme. During my two years' experience as a householder I have had ten maids, and that I have had so many is by no means my fault. As I write, they pass in mental review before me—tall, short, thin, stout, skilful, indolent, Irish, German, and French. Why is it that the capable ones are apt to be intemperate and quarrelsome, and the lazy ones good-natured?

Eunice was my first "help." After I trained her she gave excellent satisfaction, but she gave me to understand that she was "keeping company," and she married before the year ended. Eunice always interested me, and I grew to be quite fond of her. She did not seem to be indigenous to New Jersey. Anastasia, who is familiar with her type, said that she was a New England "escape." Anastasia is apt to be right about such matters. Eunice and I got on very comfortably, and I insist that she did not do as she

pleased, tho Cincinnatus more than once went so far as to say that I did as she pleased.

Eunice took much interest in my welfare, and at the same time she took much interest in the welfare of Cincinnatus. Indeed, she used to tell people that we were "keeping company." So we were, if sitting together in my parlor five evenings each week means keeping company. Eunice once asked me if Mr. King owned his house. I told her he did. "What did he go and buy a house *for?*" she asked, then added, "I suppose you can sell yours."

Eunice favored me with all the details of her love affair, and when it ran too smoothly she drew upon her invention to supply quarrels and other incidents which are supposed to make courtship piquant. Her lover was a good, stolid fellow, who adored her after his plain fashion, but he was too prosy to suit her, and I feared she would reject him for a more picturesque suitor. At last she decided that he would "get a good living," if he wasn't ornamental, and they were married in my parlor. I gave her what she most wanted, a silver and cut-glass pickle-castor, and I added enough table linen to last ten years. She was duly grateful, and she assured me that she

would not have left me for any other reason than "getting married."

She came to see me soon after she returned from her wedding journey, and, like a married woman, she patronized me. As she left, she said, "You'd better not wait too long to get married, Miss Sharpe. There is something about being called Mrs. that sort of pays for being tied up." As she spoke she glanced significantly toward Cincinnatus's house.

Mary followed Eunice. She was Irish, stout, and competent, and an excellent cook, but she turned out to be an opium fiend. Christine, French and dainty in all her ways, wore my cambric skirts and helped herself to my toilet-waters. I bore all this till I discovered that she had borrowed my sapphire ring—then I sent her away.

Hilda was a Swede, as strong as a lion; she kept the house beautifully neat and broke my most cherished *bric-à-brac*. Bridget, who had several qualities to recommend her, came home from a party one night "drunk and disorderly," to use the language of the police courts, and sang at the top of her voice nineteen stanzas of a favorite song in almost as many keys.

Lizzie came near taking Eunice's place in my

liking, for she was capable and attractive, but she had an inebriate father who was given to paying her visits on his way from the saloon. He would be mild enough during the first part of his call, but as the liquor began to take effect he would wax riotous, and before I could get him out of the house there would be a scene. I stood it as long as I could, for Lizzie's sake, but after her father fell down on my veranda in a drunken stupor I had to tell her to go. She at once got a place in the family of the saloon-keeper, and I trust that her father visits her often.

Gretchen came with excellent recommendations, and at the end of the second week she decamped with about forty dollars' worth of silver. It did not take me long to learn that a good recommendation may not be worth the paper it is written on. Women seem to be willing to give them to the most incompetent servants.

I won't deny that there were times when I wished myself back in a boarding-house, but hope always sprang up within my breast, and I would tell myself that the next specimen would be all that a maid should be. I tried a companion once, but that plan did not work; neither did she. She wanted to come, she begged me to take her.

She was to perform the regular duties of a maid, but she was to have the name of a companion out of respect for what she was pleased to call family pride. I did the work when any was done, and she nursed her rheumatism. I soon got rid of her, and tried to get on alone for a while with the help of a child who came in to wash dishes, and a woman who did the cleaning. Of course my writing languished at such times, and when my funds ran low I would go to New York, spend part of a day in an intelligence office, take a woman home with me, and turn her loose in the kitchen, while I shut myself in the study and wrote to make up lost time.

But it is a long lane which has no turn. After several months of this bondage I found the very woman for whom I had been looking, or, rather, she found me. I was surprised when I opened the door and she told me her errand, for I saw at once that she was a lady. I guessed, and rightly, that she had been a teacher. I told her that I had nothing for her, that I wanted a woman for general housework. She understood what I wanted, and asked me to try her. She was tired of teaching, she fancied she had a talent for housekeeping, and she was ready to begin at

once. She had no recommendations, and she hoped I would ask for none. I can read faces, and I took her.

After ten minutes spent in her room she came to the study door, and asked for my orders. It was ten o'clock of a hot, sultry, sticky morning; the house was in disorder, for the last incumbent had left the day before, I was in the grip of a story, and I could not remember that I ever knew anything about housekeeping.

"Do exactly as you please," I said. "Don't ask anything of me. Serve dinner at half-past six, and let it be anything you please. I wish nothing at noon but a glass of milk."

As I took the penholder out of my hair and turned again to my desk, a strange peace came over me. Straightway the foggy places in my story became clear. The rebellious, almost vicious heroine began to listen to the manly hero, and I wrote on till one, when there was a light tap at the door, and a salver, containing a pitcher of ice-cold milk, a plate of graham wafers, and a saucer of berries was set before me. When, at four, I left my work and went to my room for my ante-prandial nap, I saw and heard nothing of my new acquisition. A nap, a bath, a fresh

white gown, and I went downstairs with pleasant anticipations of dinner. There was no sound from the kitchen, no odor of "burned-on" meat, as during the *régime* of the last maid. I walked through the hall and stood on the back porch watching the sunset. Through the open kitchen window came the aroma of coffee, and I saw the cook, in an immaculate white apron, taking the soup into the dining-room. A moment later she came and announced that dinner was served.

And a perfect dinner it was, from the clear soup down to the coffee, which was better than my own, and coffee-making is one of my accomplishments. Besides being an excellent cook, the new maid was a perfect waitress, and I rose from the table feeling that for once, at least, the fates had been kind to me.

It was rather awkward to decide how to address her. She told me that her name was Jane Leavitt, but I could not bring myself to say Jane to one who was evidently as much of a lady as I am. Neither could I call her Miss Leavitt. I told Cincinnatus of my difficulty, and after chaffing me about my lady help, he suggested that I call her Leavitt, after the English fashion, which

I did and do, to the satisfaction of all parties concerned.

As I told Cincinnatus, my content and satisfaction in Leavitt were too deep to last. It all seemed too good to be true. But she has been with me more than six months, and nothing has happened to disturb my peace, and I feel perfectly secure. I can't think of anything that could happen, except that Leavitt should marry. Cincinnatus suggests that I might marry, but I tell him that would make no difference. The wellnigh impossible he who takes me for better or for worse must take Leavitt too.

But I see no reason why she should leave me. She was looking for just the situation which she has. She does not work very hard, for she makes her brains save her heels, as the saying is. The washing and ironing are sent out, and she has Mrs. Granby to scrub and clean whenever she wants her. I pay Leavitt more than I ever paid any one else, but I find that I am economizing by so doing, for nothing is broken or wasted. It is such a comfort to be able to use my pet china and cut glass every day without expecting to hear a crash three or four times a week. Besides, I have no care whatever. Leavitt does all

the marketing, and I seldom order a meal, unless I happen to want some particular thing. She seems to find out by intuition what I like, and she cooks it to suit me. Cincinnatus is so envious of this ideal state of things that he tells me I am afraid of Leavitt. I am not afraid of her, but I see no reason for troubling myself about housekeeping when she is so abundantly competent to manage everything and leave me free for my writing. I have never done so much satisfactory work in any other six months of my life as I have since Leavitt has been with me.

Surely, there never were more ideal relations between mistress and maid. All I ask of her is certain results, and it is none of my affair how she reaches them. I do not ask her to do her work as Grandma Sharpe did hers; probably her methods are much better than Grandma's. There are women who require a servant to do everything just as they do it, and they find fault if, in drying a plate, she dries the inside first instead of the outside.

Leavitt's kitchen is as convenient as a kitchen can be. There are all sorts of modern improvements, and I am ready to supply anything she lacks. There is a high chair for her to sit in

while washing dishes, and a low rocker for her to rest in when not actively engaged. I would put a lounge in the kitchen if she would let me, but she never lounges. The sun pours in through the two south windows, and Mary Jane, the cat, sits in the sunshine and washes her face. I like to go to Leavitt's kitchen, and I often make an excuse for lingering there. Sometimes, when my story drags, I would like to change places with her, and make a cake instead of spinning a yarn.

I am sure that Leavitt nas a history. I have known it from the first. She has no friends, and she gets no letters, except at very long intervals, and the envelopes are readdressed two or three times. I am curious, I confess. Leavitt has a story, and these letters, with their crossed-out towns, have something to do with it. She always seems disturbed after the receipt of these letters, but tho her heart may ache, poor thing, her cooking is as perfect as ever. That woman is an artist in her line. Such salads, such *timbales*, all made out of next to nothing!

As I said, I guessed at once that she was a teacher, but I can't remember when I first began to talk over all sorts of questions with her. She

is an authority on many subjects, and I often rush out to her with some question, and I never fail to get an encyclopediac reply, whether she is making toast or paring potatoes. A fine linguist, she has many of the great books printed in modern languages, and not a few of the classics on the shelves in her room. I respect her erudition, for I know that she is thorough. I can't hold a candle to her, as the saying is. I have always suspected that I am superficial, and since I have known Leavitt I have been sure of it.

By the way, Leavitt's room is just like her. There is nothing ornamental in it but some pots of blooming pansies in the windows—not a thing which a woman would naturally have about her. An anchorite might use the little room for his cell.

Her dress is as plain as her room; as neat as possible, but almost masculine in its severity. I often wonder what she thinks of my lace-trimmed and befrilled muslin gowns. Sometimes when she is serving my meals I feel that she is thinking that it is time I renounced ruffles and ribbons and little waves about my temples. But my dainty house-gowns are very comfortable, and my hair crinkles naturally, so it is not all vanity.

I own that in the pursuit of a possible story—material runs short sometimes—I have tried to draw Leavitt out. But I have met with no success. She always makes me feel very small and inquisitive, and I am glad to relapse into minding my own business. It is baffling to have a living, moving story-book under one's own roof and not be permitted to turn the pages. If I were to guess the text upon the title-page I would say it is "*Ich habe gelebt und geliebt.*" I also, Leavitt, thank God, sad tho the experience may have been.

Cincinnatus laughs at my curiosity. He can not understand the interest I take in ferreting out a romance. He says I am romantic to a degree, but I am not more so than other women. I must write stories, and, naturally, I must have material. Cincinnatus is romantic in his own way, tho he always denies the charge. I often wonder why he has never married. Sometimes I fancy I see a romance beginning between him and Maud. Maud is my niece, nineteen, and fair to look upon. She has not much sense, but that will come with years. I almost said more's the pity. Indeed, tho Maud thinks that I consider her a goose, I am glad that she is a little silly;

one can be young but once, and I want her to make the most of her opportunities.

Maud comes to me three or four times a year, and goes through Red Roof like a whirlwind. Even Laddie, the staid collie, knows that something unusual is going on, and he looks at me as if trying to say, "How can we old people stand this?" Maud is as good as a story-book, with her fads and follies, and I cork my ink-bottle and trot around after her. She is very gay, and I have to chaperon her, no matter how busy I am, for I want her to have a good time when she is with me. Cincinnatus is as foolish as I am. For instance, I have seen him evince as much interest in the collection of silver utensils which Maud wears on her girdle, as would suffice to decipher a cryptogram. Indeed, that array of trinkets is quite as puzzling as a cryptogram.

Maud, for her part, likes Cincinnatus. She says he is a dear old thing. Sometimes I am sure that he more than likes her. He shows an alertness in her presence which I notice at no other time. He is twenty-three years her senior, but there have been happy marriages with even more disparity. He certainly seems younger when Maud is here. The other day he came in

with a rose in his buttonhole, and he was actually humming "an old love tune," and he forty-three, if he is a day!

I should miss Cincinnatus if he were to marry Maud and become my nephew. I should pity him, too, for Maud would play havoc with his prim bachelor ways. She would pin a flower in his buttonhole, but she would forget to put his winter flannels away from the moths, and she would be careless about ordering his dinners. The competent woman who mothers him would not stay if my flighty Maud became the head of his establishment.

Should I be sorry for other reasons if Cincinnatus married Maud? I don't understand why I should, for nothing is more certain than that I don't want to marry him. If I ever marry it will be some one very different from Cincinnatus —"that good knight of a stout, middle-aged Low Churchman," as Anastasia calls him. I suppose she would laugh if she heard me speak of marriage even as the most remote possibility. Does a woman ever reach the age when she entirely gives up the idea of marriage? Aunt Frances, fifty-eight, and fifteen years widowed, told me lately, with a simper, of some old widower who

wished to pay her "attention." She was quite offended when I laughed at the idea of a woman of her age marrying. Probably as one advances her own age seems less to her. Perhaps when I am fifty-eight I may consider myself quite a young person. When I was Maudie's age forty seemed older than seventy does now.

But I have not answered my own question about Cincinnatus. I believe I don't want to see him married. If he married a sensible woman of his own age I shouldn't mind, but he would be more likely to marry a young girl. I don't want to lose the opportunity of fighting with Cincinnatus, and if he were to marry there would be a difference.

CHAPTER VII

CINCINNATUS is a man among ten thousand. I have come to know him very well during the last twelve years, but I never believed that he could refrain from saying "I told you so," when he had such provocation as I recently gave him.

The truth is, I have lost money. It isn't much —between three and four hundred—and I don't mind losing it so much as I mind the way I lost it. Cincinnatus told me not to go into that building loan association, and I should have listened to him. I have taken his advice about my investments ever since I have had anything to invest, and I have always found it safe to follow him. But some interested parties talked me into the building loan, and I went in. I have felt nervous about the money for some time, and I have recently learned that the whole affair has failed, and the director has absconded. But when Cincinnatus heard of it he never once said, "I told you so!" On the contrary, he was very nice and comforting. I think I never liked Cincin-

natus so well as I did that evening. He even went so far as to tell me of several foolish investments he had made.

He was so nice that I felt constrained to bring out my novel and read the foggy places to him. I was unusually depressed about the story. Usually I am hopeful, almost conceited, about my work. I do it and send it off, and begin a new story at once, while Cincinnatus polishes his essays till he is in danger of polishing the life out of them. But when I do get depressed I am in the deepest depths. Then I understand the lines:

> "And each man hears as the twilight nears, to the beat of his dying heart,
> The Devil drum on the darkened pane, 'You did it, but is it art?'"

I had heard him drum on the study pane that afternoon as it grew dusk, and I lay on the couch, sure that I never could write, and that I ought to be keeping boarders that very minute. At such times I have to hold myself to keep from burning all my work which is not already in print. I rose and looked at the row of books with my name on the title-pages, and re-read the pleasant reviews, which I own to keeping in a scrap-book. It usually takes me three or four

days to get over such spells, and while they last I keep the study door locked, leaving the ink to dry upon the pen, and I do something with all my might—something which is as far removed as possible from literary work. I flee to the garden and pot plants, pick grapes or currants, according to the season. If it chances to be winter I rummage the attic, or make mince-meat. I would like to make soap or sausage, for I want to toil so hard with my hands that I will forget myself till the spell wears off. Thanks to Cincinnatus, this attack wore off very soon. He seemed to see what the story lacked, and after a few hints and some appreciative words about my work in general, he made me feel that, after all, I had not mistaken my calling. By ten the next morning I was at my desk, as happy as if I never again expected to hear that tap on the darkened pane.

To do him justice, Cincinnatus has been in an angelic mood for some time. There was the episode of the burglar. I didn't have a burglar, but I might have had. Cincinnatus was very nice about that affair, and never once "twitted" me that I was afraid. It was the first time that I had been afraid since I had been in my own house. Leavitt was ill, or there would have been

no occasion for going after Cincinnatus. She would have had more sense than to think of a burglar. I was locking up for the night. The door of the little entry or lobby had been locked early in the evening, but before I locked the door which leads from the kitchen into the entry, I wished to satisfy myself about the door which opens from the entry on the back porch. I tried to push the kitchen door open, but it was fast on the other side. Push as hard as I would, it would not open. It was loose below, but the upper part was firmly fast. I knew just what it meant—a button had slipped, and it, not a burglar, was holding the door; but I imagined a man, with his shoulder against the upper part of the door. The more I thought about it, the more plainly I could see the man, and I was sure that he had a big head with black hair. I might have taken a lantern and looked in the entry window, but I dared not; I could not bear to see that big black head against the door. But why should I put myself through such a nervous strain, when Cincinnatus was so near? Hadn't he told me again and again to call him if anything frightened me? I had thanked him, smiling at the idea of anything frightening me. Now my pride was to

have a fall. Cincinnatus was in the study, less than a stone's throw away; I could see his shadow on the shade. I rushed out of the front door, and rang the bell. His cousin, Mrs. Barton, came to the door. I was sorry that it was she and not the maid, but I told her in a dignified manner that I wished to speak to Mr. King. I declined her invitation to come in—I would wait and see him in the hall. She looked as if she thought I had come to propose to him. That woman lives in mortal dread that she will lose her home through Cincinnatus's marrying me.

Cincinnatus came out of the study at once. "Anything wrong, Honor?"

I waited a moment, till Mrs. Barton went into the sitting-room. "No; that is—I am a goose, Cincinnatus."

He smiled. "Of course I can not dispute you, Honor, but——"

"It is very silly at my years; if I were Maud I might be forgiven. Cincinnatus, I know there isn't a burglar in my entry, but I can't be satisfied to go back to that house till you have looked. The door is fast just where a man's shoulder would be braced against it, if there was a man there."

"Probably the button has slipped, but you are quite right to want the matter investigated. I'll take a lantern and let you look in the window. You did quite right to come," Cincinnatus repeated, as he took his stick in one hand and the lantern in the other.

I tagged on behind, as the children say, feeling safe and silly. Cincinnatus flashed the lantern on the entry window. "Nothing there," he said kindly. "Now the next thing is to get the button turned. Is the window unlocked? Yes."

He gave me the lantern to hold while he climbed through the window. A moment later he opened the entry door, and we sat down in the kitchen, Cincinnatus panting. He is not an athletic man, even for forty-three, and his exertions had made his face very red. I gave him a glass of water, and hoped he would not have apoplexy. To my great relief, he was quite himself in a few minutes. There is a door leading from the stairs hall into the entry, but neither Cincinnatus nor I thought of that.

Something in the arrangement of the kitchen cupboards attracted his attention, and I opened them for his inspection. The whole kitchen was looked over, and, to my great triumph, he said it

was more convenient than his. It was the first time he had ever admitted that my house is in any way superior to his. I understood why he said it then; he felt that I was chagrined about the burglar, and he wanted to make me feel as comfortable as possible.

I was so pleased with him that I bethought myself what I could give him by way of a reward. Mince pie? The very thing! He has dyspepsia, and therefore has no business to eat mince pie at all; for that very reason he would be sure to enjoy it at ten in the evening. I got the pie and set it forth on the kitchen-table. I brought cheese also, another thing which Cincinnatus should never touch. He ate two pieces of pie, and I toasted his cheese over the kitchen fire. We were very comfortable, and it never occurred to me to invite him into the dining-room.

After the pie we had what Cincinnatus calls "a good crack." It started in his calling his mince pie "meat pie," after the old New England fashion, and then we very naturally spoke of the various ramifications of the pie family. One thing brought on another, and we were soon deep in a discussion of the Puritan, tracing him to his three homes—England, Nederland, and New

England. We nearly quarreled before we got through, for Cincinnatus declared that I claimed everything for the Dutch. But after his angelic behavior about the entry door, I felt that I ought to make a few concessions, and I made them.

The kitchen clock chimed twelve, and Cincinnatus jumped to his feet as if it had struck him. In all the years he had been calling on me he had never stayed so late.

"I am very much obliged to you," I said, as I let him out. "I know I was very silly about that door."

"Not at all, not at all. It was the most natural conclusion. Perfectly natural, I assure you. Good-night, Honor."

He held out his hand as he spoke. We live so near each other that we seldom think it necessary to observe these formalities, but we shook hands cordially.

The very next morning I lost patience with Cincinnatus. I was ashamed of it afterward, for he had been so good to me. Leavitt was still in bed, and I got my own breakfast. My cereal was cooked and the tray ready to carry up to Leavitt, when I went to get the can of cream which the milkman always leaves on the back

stoop. It wasn't there. I looked about, thinking that some vandal cat had upset the can and eaten the cream. But there was no trace of can or cream. Just then the milkman drove past again; I hailed him, and found that he had a new boy who had made a mistake and left two cans of cream at Mr. King's. So Cincinnatus had two cans of cream, and I had none. It was storming hard, but I could not eat my breakfast without cream, so I put on Leavitt's golf cape and old hat and ran over to Cincinnatus's by the back way.

Mrs. Barton looked at me even more severely than she had done the evening before. Was I coming after Cincinnatus before breakfast? was her thought, no doubt. She seemed relieved when I told my errand. Mr. King had just gone over to my house with a can of cream. She wondered that I had not met him. He must have been on his way while I was coming, for it was not three minutes ago that she saw him get his stick out of the hall, and start out of the front door. "His stick," I muttered, as I went back, "pity he couldn't walk five steps without that stick. If he hadn't stopped to get his stick he would have been at my house before I went out." I went

home by the front way, expecting to find the cream on the stoop, but it was not there. For some reason Cincinnatus had not thought best to leave it on the porch, and the door was locked. I would have that cream if it took all day to get it. I rushed over again by the front way, to learn that Cincinnatus had just gone back to my house by the back way. I ran this time, and found him sitting on the stoop waiting for me. I took the cream in an ungracious manner, and hurried in out of the rain, tripping over Leavitt's cat, who wanted her own breakfast. I had intended to ask Cincinnatus if the "meat pie" had troubled him, but I forgot it. It was a little thing to get so "riled" over, but a rain-storm to Cincinnatus in rubber boots, mackintosh, and a stick—he never carries an umbrella—and a rain-storm to me in skirts were two different matters. It is all very well to talk of the equality of the sexes till you see a man and a woman out in a rain-storm.

Cincinnatus heaped coals of fire on my head by sending me a chicken at dinner-time, delightfully roasted. He sent it by the maid, with a note, saying he knew that Leavitt was ill, and that I would be too busy nursing her to think of cook-

ing. He kindly offered to lend me his maid, if I needed her; Mrs. Barton could get along without her. I didn't need her, but I appreciated Cincinnatus's thoughtfulness, and I sent a note saying so. Leavitt's throat was too sore to swallow anything solid, poor thing, so I ate a large portion of the chicken, and finished it the next day.

I returned Cincinnatus's bounty soon after by sending him a suet pudding with hard sauce. He is especially fond of this pudding, which of course, he has no business to eat, and his cousin can not make it successfully. Like the "pies that mother used to make," he is always telling her how good it used to be at home.

These little neighborly happenings are a great deal to us, who live such quiet lives. Life is not dull to us, far from it. As I often say, I should miss Cincinnatus if he should die or marry.

CHAPTER VIII

Rosalind came to spend last Sunday with me. She is a newspaper woman, ten years my junior; still, we are very good friends. She is a young woman who gets the credit of being very self-reliant, self-sufficient, and all other adjectives usually compounded with self. I have known her for years, I have admired her pluck and perseverance, without once suspecting that there are weak places in her armor.

She came to my room Saturday evening to brush her hair, but, instead of settling herself for our usual chat, she burst out, "I am disgusted. I was told to-day, for the forty-seventh time during the last month, that I am so self-reliant. Fiddlesticks!" And Rosalind threw her hair-brush on the rug with a tragic air.

"What is the matter?" I asked. "Why do you object to being called self-reliant?"

"Because I am not one bit self-reliant or independent, or anything. So there!" And Rosalind's voice fairly quivered.

I picked up the hair-brush and put it in her lap, and awaited further confidences.

"I hate the whole thing," she went on. "I mean I hate this struggle with the world. I flatter myself that no one guesses it, and I thrash about in a swashbuckler fashion, as if I enjoyed it. But I would give my right hand if I could live a sheltered life."

"I have known you for six years and I never guessed anything like this," I said. "You impress one as a woman who enjoys walking over obstacles, and who likes to fight her own battles."

"I'm glad you didn't suspect it. I am sure that if you didn't no one else would. It proves that I am a successful humbug. I am. I don't mean anything I say nor say anything I mean. I'm a perfect contradiction—a woman's heart and a mannish outside. I'm a sheep in wolf's clothing. I declare to you, Honor Sharpe, that I would rather wake up some morning and find that I had died during the night—never mind the Hibernianism—than to go on living this way. It is intolerable."

Rosalind rose and walked the floor. "What do I want? I suppose you will ask. I want everything—anything I haven't got. I envy you,

for you have a home of your own. I want one; I am tired of living in other people's houses. I earn enough to have my own roof, but my friends tell me it wouldn't be proper for me to live alone; I am four or five years too young."

"Why don't you marry?" I asked. "You have had more than one good chance."

"I don't want to marry, but I want to want to. I am not in love, but I am in love with love. I hope you see the distinction. I have lived alone too long to make a success of marriage. I believe I am too 'sot' in my way. I couldn't get along with a man who has a will of his own, and I should despise one who hadn't. After all, there is some truth in this talk about the new woman, tho when I talk to men I always insist that there 'ain't no sich person.' But there is, and I am one of her, more's the pity."

"But you just said that you are a womanly woman."

"So I am, in streaks. I could never get used to asking a man for money," said Rosalind, begining to walk the floor again; "I have earned my own so long that I should feel that it was immoral to take my husband's money."

"I don't see but that you have what you want,

after all. You are perfectly independent, and so long as you don't want to marry—"

"I told you that I want to want to," said Rosalind, sharply. "Besides, if a woman doesn't marry, all the world and his wife, particularly his wife, think it is because she can't. I'm ashamed to confess that I mind this, but I do. I am twenty-nine years old, and I am classed with old maids, while I have ten times the sense I had when I was nineteen, and I am better looking. At any rate, I like my looks better. People don't put a man of my years on the shelf; he is just beginning to be interesting. No one says he is unmarried because he can't help himself, but I and all my sister women are unmarried because we can't get any one to marry us. Is there any justice in all this? One can't go about the world telling people that one could have married, and if one were foolish enough to do so, no one would believe it. We are supposed to have designs on every detached man. The only bright man at our boarding-house is a youth of twenty who is in college. He sits next me at table, and we talk a great deal. I am mortally afraid that some woman will say that 'the old maid is making up to him.' Oh, the world

is out of joint, don't attempt to tell me that it isn't!"

"I can't tell just what you are driving at," I said, "but as near as I can come to a summing up of your remarks, they amount to this: Is it worth while to marry in order to prove that one can?"

"I give it up." And Rosalind began to braid her hair for the night.

Next morning she refused to talk upon the same subject, tho I made several attempts to introduce it. I knew that something out of the common run had occurred to stir her up so, and I boldly asked, "Who is he, Rosalind?"

We were at breakfast, and she salted her eggs with sugar, but she made no reply. I was sure that my suspicions were correct, especially as she ate the sugared eggs without discovering her mistake. We went to church in the morning and walked in the afternoon, and came home to lounge in the study and chat. But Rosalind did not seem disposed to talk, so I took a book and left her to herself, knowing that she would confide in me when she was ready to do so. After an hour or so, she raised her head from the rug, where she was lying with the collie, and said, quite as if continuing a conversation:

"He is a clergyman."

"Oh," said I.

"It couldn't be worse. High Church and all that sort of thing, and I with my meetin'-house tendencies. I don't see what he is thinking of, do you? I can't do ecclesiastical embroidery, can I?"

"Hardly," I laughed.

"Nor conduct mothers' meetings and guilds or whatever you call them?"

"Why don't you tell him so?"

"I have. He thinks I am in love with this newspaper life, drat it!" The last two words were said under her breath. "I know I should make him miserable, and I think too much of him for that. It would be dreadful for a clergyman if his wife got tired of prunes and prisms and went back to her newspaper, wouldn't it?"

"Dreadful? It would be shocking."

"And it would be just like me to want to get away from the whole thing, wouldn't it?"

"I shouldn't be surprised at any time to hear that you had gone back to your woman's page."

"Yet you can't think how I hate the old W. P. at times. I wonder if I could hate the other —thing any worse?"

"Probably; you know you can't embroider."

"It is his own risk, for I have told him all these things again and again."

"I never supposed, Rosalind, that you would marry just to show that you can get a husband."

"Do you think me so unprincipled? I think the world and all of Stanley Ward, and I hesitate only because I am afraid I can't make him happy." And the redoubtable Rosalind Keith buried her face on Laddie's back and sobbed like a baby.

Having brought affairs to this unexpected crisis, I was naturally in doubt what to do next. I did nothing. I went to my room, leaving Rosalind to herself. After a while I heard her playing evening hymns in the parlor. I did not see her till supper-time, when she was quite herself again.

She had to take an early train to the city, and I drove her to the station. As her train came in sight, I said, "Bring Mr. Ward out to dinner on Wednesday."

"Wednesday? No; we are going to dine with his sister in Brooklyn, but if you can make it Thursday, we shall be very glad to come."

I arranged for Thursday, and drove home,

speechless at the depths in Rosalind's character. I have since learned that she had refused Mr. Ward for the third time only the evening before she came to see me, but what she was pleased to call my discouragement made her decide to marry him and prove that she was a normal woman. So she went to her office and wrote a note accepting him. The following Thursday they dined with me, and no one would have guessed that Rosalind had not been engaged a year. She was very charming in her new *rôle*, and Cincinnatus, who was one of the people invited to meet them, was so surprised at the change in her, that he talked of nothing else for a week afterward.

This state of mind which Rosalind is in is too good to last; she will have moments when she will not be so sure of herself. Still, I think she and her clergyman will be happy. I am sure I hope so.

Rosalind knows Anastasia. That is, they have met at my house, and are on pleasant terms. So I naturally intended to write to Anastasia about the engagement. I happened to remember, however, that the clergyman had once seemed interested in Anastasia, so I did not mention the engagement. Not that I thought that she had any

special liking for Mr. Ward, tho she did like to quarrel with him about things ecclesiastical. He is ritualistic, and she is low. At least she says she is, while Cincinnatus says she is high. I knew she would hear of the engagement from some one else. This morning I had a characteristic letter from her. She had heard the news.

"I suppose you have heard that the Reverend Stanley Ward is engaged, and that the lady is Miss Keith, better known to you as Rosalind. So the ex-admirer of white muslin and blue ribbon will marry a newspaper woman. Isn't it a joke? I thought that if he ever married it would be some one whom he fondly believed to be a sweet girl with no opinions, but this is different and lots more fun. Rosalind will hold his interest longer than 'Amelia' would have done, and if she likes to take the risk it is her own affair.

"I have been trying to perform the psychological feat of mentally turning inside out, with a view to discovering anything that might be dignified with the name of a Pang. I would gladly wear the willow or any other herb, in fact a whole herbarium, if I could extract from it any juice of sentiment to feed the vital juices of my story."

So Anastasia is writing a story! About once in five years she produces one. She and Cincinnatus take their literary work easily. Of course, they are not dependent upon it as I am. Cincinnatus can live independently of his pen if he chooses, and Anastasia's teaching provides her with bread and shoes.

To go back to Rosalind. As she says, she has warned Stanley Ward of the risk he is taking. To me he seems the most conservative of men, and Rosalind is a very modern young woman. It would have been wiser of him to set his affections upon some "Amelia," of the white muslin and blue ribbon. Still, all may go well, if Rosalind loves him, and I believe she thinks she does. They are going to keep house, and I have promised to help Rosalind furnish the rectory. She is coming twice a week to have Leavitt teach her "everything about housekeeping." Poor child, I hope she may never regret her newspaper.

There must be something in the air. Is all the world going to marry? I have just received a letter from Milly Seymour, an old friend and schoolmate. We have written to each other two or three times a year since our school days, and lately she has written me much much more

freely and confidentially than formerly. Milly has lived a humdrum existence in her brother's home, where she is not needed. I have guessed that she is not happy. Now she is about to marry. She is not in love with her *fiancé*, but she will have a home of her own. She is old, she writes me—thirty-eight—she has "gone off" in her looks, so that she can not expect what she might have expected ten years ago. He—she does not give him any other name—is not all she could wish him to be, but she hopes that it will be a comfortable, middle-aged match.

I let Milly's letter fall to the floor, while my thoughts went back twenty years, and I saw her as she was at eighteen. She was a saucy, blooming girl, something like my Maud, perhaps; something of a goose, but that is right and proper at eighteen. Who so high-strung as Milly then? I can not bear to think of her as broken in spirit, and "taking up" with a husband for whom she must apologize. And why? Simply because she is eight-and-thirty instead of eighteen. It is pathetic to me, and at the same time I am angry. Why should she marry at all, unless she weds her equal? There are such—middle-aged men who see that the middle-aged woman has

much which the young girl can not have: qualities and graces of mind which can come only with years. (I almost said alas!) I am arguing against my convictions. Most men, even of sedate middle age, would choose the young girl with pink cheeks, and I should probably do the same if I were a man. As Eunice would say, "It's human natur'."

But Milly need not marry at all. Neither need she be a fifth wheel in her brother's home. She had more talent than the average girl, more than I had; but I used mine, while she tied hers up in a napkin. I am sorry that she is to marry a man for whom she finds it necessary to apologize before marriage. She will find it more necessary afterward. I hope she may never live to see the time when to be alone will seem the one thing to be desired.

I was so full of Milly's letter that I could not refrain from speaking to Cincinnatus about it. He has met Milly several times, and he likes her. He at once said that the marriage was a good thing; she would be more independent as a married woman.

That remark provoked me, and I asked him if he knew of any one more independent than an

unmarried woman with a house of her own, and who is able by her own exertions to make money enough to run it. This, I said, was what Milly might have had if she had worked as I had.

"You have house on the brain," he said aggravatingly. "The woman who earns her own living is not smart, no matter how good that living is. The wise woman is the one who makes a man support her. You must be responsible for a great deal of single blessedness if you have preached the gospel of independence all these years."

All these years, forsooth! Cincinnatus need not have tried to cast my age in my teeth; I never try to hide it. But that did not make me so angry as the insinuation that I am not in favor of marriage, and the fling at "smart" women. I am in favor of marriage, and if my practise had not been orthodox my preaching has. Cincinnatus knows why I am not married, and as for my influence, let him ask Rosalind or Anastasia or any friend if I ever said a word to prejudice them against marriage.

I was angry with Cincinnatus. He said I sulked. I didn't, but I was displeased, and I showed my displeasure by a dignified silence.

He tried to brave it out; he played several of "The Songs Without Words" in his best manner to propitiate me, but the atmosphere did not become any warmer. Then he teased Laddie. At last, when he saw that no chafing-dish supper was forthcoming, he took his stick and went home. The door slammed suspiciously, but it may have been an accident. I really don't think that Cincinnatus meant to slam my front door.

I poked the fire till it glowed enough to suit such a fire-worshiper as I am; then I put some pine-cones on the blaze. Anastasia had sent me a large bagful from her "country of the pointed firs." She always burns them in the great stone fireplace in "The Crotchet," her Maine cottage. She says she never puts them on the fire without feeling that she is murdering infant princes. "To think what goes for that moment of fire-blossom!"

The pine-cones brought me pleasant thoughts of her, and the evening closed fairly well, after all. "Poor Milly," I thought, as I stood at my chamber window after the gas was out, and watched the stars through the leafless branches of my elms. I had sometimes complained be-

cause my life had been too busy, but to-night I was thankful that I had so many resources, so much "hived honey of enjoyment," to use poor, starved little Charlotte Brontë's words.

CHAPTER IX

Like Lord Byron, I awoke one morning and found myself famous. A few days ago the milkman said to me—Leavitt was out and I took in the milk—"My little girl is going to recite on Children's Day. You are a literary woman, and you must have good taste about poetry. I'd take it as a great favor if you would select something for Genevieve to speak. Anything which you select will be suitable, I am sure. My wife told me to ask you."

If I had a child who showed symptoms of "speaking pieces" I would send it to the house of correction; but I am good-natured, and I promised Mr. Waters that I would find a "piece." He was very much pleased, and he fairly beamed as I took my pint of cream and quart of milk and went into the house.

It was easier to promise to find a selection than to find it. I wasted the whole morning, looking over scrap-books and boxes of clippings, but there was nothing. So, in desperation, I took

my pen and wrote a few lines to the effect that flowers did all they could to please and people loved them; and if little girls did all they could to please, how much more they would be loved than the flowers. There were two or three flaws in the rhythm, and little enough sense in the whole thing, but I gave it to the milkman the next morning, and forgot all about the affair till a week later, when a marked copy of one of the local papers came to me. It contained an account of the Children's Day exercises, and I read that "Little Miss Genevieve Waters recited a poem composed expressly for her by our talented townswoman, Miss Honor Sharpe." Then followed the wishy-washy verses in full.

Since the publication of these verses my popularity has rapidly increased. People who have ignored my books and magazine articles have spoken to me about my poem. "It is so sweet, so touching." "I put it in my scrap-book." Verily, in the words of Vincent Crummles, "This is fame." Cincinnatus saw the paper, and he has chaffed me considerably about my "dropping into poetry." He says my fame is made in this town.

Strange, but the silly little poem has set me to

unearthing a stratum of papers belonging to what I might call my paleozoic era. Once I contemplated publishing a sheaf of poems, under the very original title, "A Woman's Poems." I gave up the idea years ago, for I saw that I had nothing to say which I could not say better in prose. Still, I must say that I know of no better preparation for prose writing than the writing of poetry, provided one burns the poetry.

But my poetry. I suppose it was as good, or as bad, as five thousand American women can write. I am glad I didn't publish it. As I said, the verses for the milkman's child made me get out the poetry, and it was like digging up my buried youth. I indulged in "a good cry" up in my attic, among the herbs. If I had ever been in doubt about my having a story, I was not after I read my old poems and looked my past in the face. I did love him, I will be true to myself and own it. I did love him, and I like myself better when I own the truth. I am glad I wrote the poem for the milkman's little girl, for it was the means of bringing back the past. It is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. The tender grace of a dead day does live. Thank God, it all is worth while.

And it is the first love which stays. "*Die erste Liebe ist die beste.*"

If I could be a young girl again, wearing a flower-trimmed hat, and a white frock and a blue ribbon sash, and if I could have my red cheeks and my slim waist, and if one could offer me my choice, to love as I have loved, and lose it all,—all but the memory,—or never to have the love and the loss, I would choose to live it all over again, and be content to sit with nothing but my memories beside my lonely hearth. All is not gone, far from it. "Recollection is the only Paradise from which we can not be driven out."

> "There sits a blessed memory on its throne;
> There my life centers."

Yes, it pays. "*Ich habe gelebt und geliebt.*" It is a great deal to know.

After I had found my poems and had my cry out among the herbs in the attic, I carried them —the poems, not the herbs—down with me, and to-night I have read them over. As verses they are worth little more than nothing, but as autobiography they are priceless. Oh, "the tender grace of a day that is dead" can be inexpressibly dear to a woman beside a lonely hearth! Strange,

how the little things of life and love stay with one! The little, silly name, which you would never repeat, rings in your ears after all these years. The first caress, can you forget it? The twilight walk, when, perhaps, no words were spoken audibly,—can any voyage over-seas bring back the thrill which came to you among those quiet ways?

I put out my hand and took down the most perfect love-poems written in any language which I know, and read that sonnet beginning, "First time he kissed me." I am very much of a woman after all, but I am prouder of my weakness than of my strength. I used to gnash my teeth and rage because I was mastered so, but one is different at forty from what one was at twenty. The poems will go back to their place in the attic to-morrow, and I shall go on in my usual way, but I know that I shall be a better woman for living over the past.

I must have been a strange girl, and there was no one to tell me how strange I was. Father and mother died when I was a mere child, leaving nothing behind them but three children, who had to be adopted by our relatives. My brother Merry and I fell to Uncle Jacob and Aunt Maria,

and John went to other friends. Aunt Maria might have stepped from the pages of a story-book. She did her best for me according to her "light," and I must not blame her because her idea of an illumination was a tallow candle instead of a homelike lamp. The life I led in that great, square house can not be described. My body was warmed and fed, but my spirit was cold and starved. I have never since been able to look at one of those great, square houses without a shudder. Everything was scrupulously clean, and every want was provided for, but there was no comfort, no easy chairs and couches, no open fires and "pillowy" places, no pleasant litter of books and work, as there is in my little house. And that is the very reason my house abounds in cosy places; I try to make up to myself the homelikeness which I missed during my early years.

Aunt Maria must have been something like the aunt in "Aurora Leigh." I was no Aurora, no genius, but I suffered like her. I was like other girls, but Aunt Maria had never been young in feeling, and she had no children of her own. So I suppose she could not be expected to understand what I needed. Once I tried to tell her what I

missed—petting and mothering—but she looked at me as if I were speaking in a strange tongue. After that I never attempted to get nearer to her.

There was one bright spot in my life, my brother Merry, but he was drowned when I was ten years old, and then life stopped for me till Paul came. I could cry for self-pity when I think of those years. I don't know how I lived. I was not allowed to mourn for Merry; Aunt Maria said that was wicked. God had taken him, and He did all things well. If I cried He would punish me. She was by no means sure that He hadn't taken my brother to punish me for being such a naughty girl. Was it any wonder that for years I was a perfect little heathen? I hated what I called religion, and now I see that I did well to hate what was only masquerading under that name.

I was fourteen years old when Paul came to live next to Uncle Jacob's, and then the story of Honor Sharpe's life began. Young as he was, only fifteen, he saved me from my thoughts. Perhaps he saved my reason; no sane child could think the thoughts that I had. Years came and went, and Paul and I were sent away to school, and our letters passed to and fro. His letters,

the boy letters, I have yet, among my most precious possessions. We met during vacations, but whether together or apart, we were all in all to each other. We did not stop to think what our companionship meant, till older people told us. Forty less twenty? Is it twenty years since that sunny September afternoon when, as the song goes, "Common sense told us we'd better kiss and part"?

There was insanity back of Paul. His grandmother had been insane and had killed herself, and his mother was "peculiar." Paul should never marry, Aunt Maria said, and, at any rate, he should not marry her niece. Who had thought of marriage? Paul had not, nor had I. But, of course, that was what would naturally have happened, altho, so far, our thoughts had not gone beyond the knowledge that our books were not interesting unless we read them together, and our music was only discord if one played or sang without the other. Oh, those years, those happy, unconscious years! I would rather forget all else in the world than to have that time taken from my memory. George Eliot wrote:

> "But were another childhood-world my share,
> I would be born a little sister there."

I wouldn't, much as I loved Merry. I would be a companion to Paul, brave, merry, teasing, chivalrous Paul. I have been privileged more than many women; I have seen the great sights of the world—for my foot, when I was younger, was a restless one, and it suited me to travel in many lands. But, when I close my eyes when tired, and call up some treasured scene, it is not a sunrise at Venice, or Mont Blanc's awful majesty, or a ruined castle on the Rhine, but some childish picture which has been kept in the sacred places of my memory all these years.

Does Paul care as I do, for what we have missed? I often ask myself the question. I hope not. It will be best if he has forgotten, and yet something tells me that it is not like Paul to forget.

We seldom met after that September afternoon. Of course we knew, and we told each other that we knew, what this happy companionship meant. But it could not go on. We could not meet and be simply friends. It must be all or nothing, and fate had decreed that it was to be nothing. How could we be so strong, such young things? Strength is for people who are old, not for youth with the bloom on its cheeks. People who

watched us thought we did not care very much. We cared, and we knew that we cared, but even we did not know then of how much the insane grandmother had robbed us. I have since been told by women who never knew the meaning of a genuine emotion, that Paul and I could not have loved each other "very much," or we would have married in spite of all warning.

How little such people dream that there is a loss which is more than gain. When I hear of lovers who love so that they can not be separated, I want to tell them that they do not know the primer of love. The love that can unclasp hands and go solitary for love's sake, is love indeed. There is a sonnet of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's, which has often comforted me. Last night I said it over to myself, and because I was not sure of one line, I rose and lighted my candle and brought the book from the study. Let me read it again:

"The hour which might have been, yet might not be,
  Which man's and woman's heart conceived and bore,
  Yet whereof love was barren—on what shore
Bides it the breaking of Time's weary sea?
Bond-child of all consummate joys set free;
  It somewhere sighs and serves, and mute before
  The house of Love, hears through the echoing door
His hours elect in choral consonancy.

"But lo! what wedded souls now hand in hand
Together tread at last the immortal strand
With eyes where burning memory lights love home?
Lo! how the little outcast hour has turned
And leaped to them and in their faces yearned—
'I am your child: O parents, ye have come.'"

Sometime, somewhere, Paul and I shall meet that little outcast hour. Till then I can wait. I have my attic, and my letters, and my poetry.

After all, I am more sorry for Paul than for myself. It isn't what Paul might have done for me that I miss, it is what I might have done for him. He has reached the age when a man needs his own fireside, and no man, no matter how talented he may be, can make a home for himself. That is the one thing which a woman can do better than a man. I think of Paul often when the night is wet, and my fire purrs on the hearth. Where is he and how is he? If I knew that he has a hearth of his own, and a woman sits opposite him, should I be jealous? It is a coarse word. No; I should be glad that he is in harbor. If, once or twice a year, I am attacked by the demon of headache, I think of Paul and his chronic, family headache. Who "poors" his head for him? There are many sad words in the vocabulary of sorrow, but I think Whittier

was right when he said, "The saddest are these, it might have been."

My friends and acquaintances often tell me that I am so well fitted to get on alone. I am so strong. I am strong; I don't need any one to take care of me. I can fend for myself. It isn't having some one to care for me that I miss out of my life; it is having some one to care for. All my friends are hopelessly comfortable and prosperous; I can't deny myself for them. I have to be selfish when I want to sacrifice myself. I am often told that I am not sympathetic, when I am simply spoiling to have some one to make a fool of myself over. Never mind the construction of that sentence. I have myself in the witness-box to-night, and I can not write academic English.

No doubt it is the maternal instinct which makes a woman want to "mother" the man she loves. I know I coddle Cincinnatus more than is good for him. I make him too comfortable. Anastasia says he will make me marry him yet. But there is no danger; Cincinnatus and I will remain on our own sides of the fence, tho I am glad, very glad to have his friendship. I should miss him very much if one of his hard coughs were to carry him off. I wonder if Cincinnatus

has had his romance? No doubt he has, but he has not taken it hard. Has he poetry in his attic, and does he sit by his fire talking to himself? I can't fancy him doing it, and yet he may. One could hardly fancy me doing it. "The meanest of His creatures has two soul-sides." The side we see in street and market is not always the side which he shows to himself when he sits and gazes into the fire.

It is a strange world. Each heart knoweth its own bitterness. I am glad that I am not bitter, but many have reason to be. What thoughts, perhaps, pass through Leavitt's mind as she sits in her bare little room? I can't express my sympathy for her in words; that would be an impertinence, even tho she is "an hireling." But I can send a thought to her, and who knows that it does not reach her? Somehow I feel that Leavitt and I are akin. And I feel, too, that her story is sadder than mine.

How much better that Paul and I were separated as we were, feeling that we should always have been true, than to have married and found out that it all was a mistake! I fear that this is what Leavitt has learned, the hardest lesson which can be learned by woman. When I think of

these things I call myself happy and fortunate. Paul and I never disappointed each other, and few married people can say as much. The story does not end at the altar, as many people seem to think. If marriage meant no more than new clothes and wedding cake, it would not be a matter to stop and weigh. But it may mean sickness and late meals and cutting down expenses and smoking chimneys and all sorts of trying things both great and small, which, it seems to me, can not be quite so irritating to a spinster as to a married woman.

Story-books and novels are responsible for a great deal. The last chapter leaves the happy couple at the altar, and it is all music and flowers and there is no hint that there ever will be anything else; and others go and do likewise, to find, to their sorrow, that life is a battle, and that love means more than fair weather.

I wonder if Paul is like Cincinnatus, a trifle fussy and old-maidish? As Anastasia says, all the old maids are not unmarried women; some are married women and some are men. I can't think of Paul as fussy and middle-aged. To me he bears the dew of his youth. I am in love with him as I saw him last, not as he must be

now. It is strange and incongruous, too, for I am twenty years older than the Paul to whom I cling. Should I care for Paul, the real Paul, if I were to see him? It never before occurred to me that I might not love this real Paul, were we to meet. It is not likely that we shall, for he keeps himself in Russia, where he is engaged in the tea trade. Business has absorbed Paul, despite his artistic temperament. How strange, for any one would have prophesied that he would be a musician or an artist. For that matter, no one would have supposed that I would earn my living by my pen. But I have done so, and shall continue to do so, unless my invention gives out. Anastasia insists that I am a great deal better off than any married woman she knows. She is in love with what she calls my free and independent life, and she threatens to give up teaching and depend on her pen. She says she would write anything for anything for the sake of being free. "Potboilers," she said the other day, "of course I'd write them. I'd write for a yellow journal or a Sunday-school paper. I'd write on anything, from 'The Spiritual Advantages of Poverty' to 'The Practical Disadvantages of Home Dressmaking.'" I wish Cincinnatus could hear when

she rails against her teaching; he would never say again that a woman goes out into the world and earns her living to prove that she is as "smart" as a man. How unjust, when most women have no higher ambition than to have a place of their own and stay in it!

But I am a long way from Paul and my story. The clock points to one. I shall have more crow's feet than my forty years warrant if I sit up so late. A woman of my age should have herself better in hand than the last pages would indicate. Perhaps there is some truth in what Cincinnatus says about my running on. After all, it is worth something to have a friend who cares enough about me to criticize me to my face. I should miss Cincinnatus if anything should happen to him.

CHAPTER X

CINCINNATUS has spent the evening here, and his conversation has been one long jeremiad against the times. Oh, those good old times! I wish I could come back by and by and hear people refer to these degenerate days as the good old times. Cincinnatus and I have had a lively dispute; he fighting for all that is not of to-day, and I taking up the gauntlet in favor of the present.

After my saying something in favor of contemporary literature, Cincinnatus threw it into my face, as the children say, that I had been known to speak in terms anything but complimentary of so-called yellow literature. He could not reconcile that with my present championship of modern books, and he remarked that I always throw myself into an argument before I am sure which side I am on. Once in, I will argue, whether I believe what I am saying or not. "Anything," he added, "so it is opposed to my views."

Now I never heard a more perfect description than Cincinnatus gave of himself just then. That is Cincinnatus to the life. I begin to give some opinion, and as soon as he sees my ground, no matter if it happens to be his own pet opinion, he flings himself over the fence, neck and crop, and the battle begins.

I believe Cincinnatus began the conversation by remarking that we have no poetesses nowadays. The word poetess is more than I can bear, and Cincinnatus knows it. He has introduced me to his friends as "Miss Sharpe, the authoress." That is bad enough, but if I were a poet, and he added the *ess*, no more coffee should he get under my roof.

"Who were the poetesses in the good old times?" I asked. I thought he would forget Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and he did.

"Well, er—Mrs. Hemans and L. E. L. and——"

"Cincinnatus, I know that you never read L. E. L., and I very much doubt if you ever read Mrs. Hemans. Oh, I know all about the breaking waves that dashed high. Cite something else. You can't, I knew it. If I had a copy of Mrs. Hemans, and I very much doubt if you have, I would read to you till you were glad to go home. The truth is, Cincinnatus, that women

poets in what you are pleased to call the good old times were as scarce as white robins; but nowadays so many women write good poetry that we don't go about calling on heaven and earth to witness."

"There you go again. You are such a modern, Honor. I believe you think there never was such a thing as a literary woman previous to the last decade. There was Hannah More, she was an all-around literary woman, if you like."

"Oh, Cincinnatus, even you couldn't read her poetry, and as for her plays, no audience would sit through one."

"Yet Garrick brought out 'Percy.' Dr. Johnson himself quoted from her poems, and said there was no name in literature that would not be proud to own them."

"There might be several declinations nowadays. I didn't know that you considered Dr. Johnson a judge of poetry."

"'Cœlebs in Search of a Wife' was translated into all the continental languages, to say nothing of the Persian and Cingalese."

"Let us hope it was more edifying to the eighteenth-century Cingalese than it is to nineteenth-century Americans."

"Hannah was hand in glove with Burke, and she was a favorite of all the brainy women of her time—Mrs. Montague, who was called her sex's glory; Mrs. Barbauld, Mrs. Carter, and Mrs. Chapone. Mrs. Siddons played Elwina in 'Percy.' 'The proof of the pudding is in the eating,' Honor. Miss Hannah More made six thousand pounds from 'Percy.' Show me the woman playwright who can do as well to-day."

I made no remark, and Cincinnatus went on with his statistics: "She was a most versatile woman. She wrote poetry, fiction, plays, and what she called moral essays."

"Which are tedious enough to turn people from the straight and narrow way," I murmured. It is almost impossible to get a word in "edgewise" when Cincinnatus sets out to "converse." Usually he merely talks, and then I can get along with him.

"You can't deny that this same Hannah More was original."

"She was,—in her use of logical terms."

"Don't be spiteful, Honor. She did a great deal of good with her pen, and she pocketed the neat little sum of thirty thousand pounds."

"If you have nothing better to read than Han-

nah More's moral essays, I am sorry for you. We have a few very respectable essayists nowadays, but you don't read them. Keep among your shades and leave me in peace with my new books."

"Let's look at the novelists. Find me another novel like one of Miss Austen's."

"I can't, unless I find you another of Miss Austen's. I can't read her, and I don't intend to make another attempt. 'Sense and Sensibility,' nearly wore me out, and I would never have finished it except to keep my word with you. I know that it is the proper thing to admire Miss Austen, but I will not feign an admiration which I do not feel; and I am too old to be bored, even by a book."

"You prefer to read George Eliot, I suppose."

"I find myself re-reading her novels every few years. I am reading 'Middlemarch' now, for the fourth time."

"'Middlemarch'! I hate a large canvas."

"I hate carving on cherry-stones. I should think you would like George Eliot; she is a dead author."

Cincinnatus did not deign to notice my thrust. He rose, and began to walk the floor. I rocked,

and waited for him to think of something else to quarrel over. Evidently he could not settle upon a subject at once, for he sat down at the piano and played arpeggios for ten minutes. After this soothing preparation, he leaned against the mantel, and gave vent to this bit of wisdom: "The advent of the new woman has destroyed the unity and usefulness of the home."

There was nothing to call forth the remark, but Cincinnatus makes a similar one every two weeks, on an average. I said nothing; I fastened my eyes upon a picture which hung opposite, and bit my tongue. Cincinnatus repeated the remark. Still no reply, and he went on:

"I was reading an article to-day on the decadence of marriage. The statistics are appalling. It is all owing to the higher education of women, and the—something in the air. Let us call it the *zeitgeist*, for want of a better word. If the educated women will not marry, what is to become of the world? If the law would shut up these women's colleges, things might get back to their normal condition. This state of affairs is alarming to a man who has seeing eyes and who longs for the ultimate good of the race."

Now the funniest thing about all this talk of

Cincinnatus's is that he believes what he says. Of course he is too intelligent a man to disbelieve in the higher education of women, but he thinks that college women do not marry. That man broods over the signs of the times, and I can not find it in my heart to quarrel with him as I would with some one who talks merely to hear himself. The worst of it is, he writes on this subject, and I must confess that, from his standpoint, he writes well. His article on "New Lamps for Old," in a recent number of *The Court of Appeals*, was a masterpiece, in its way.

Of course, it would have been easy to answer his remark by some question like "What is wrong with the new man if the new woman won't marry?" Cincinnatus would have liked nothing better, but I never quarrel with him over the woman question. I told him years ago that his standpoint was about the same as St. Paul's, and I refused to discuss the question with such a conservative. So when Cincinnatus begins on this subject I make it a point to look bored, and hold my peace. It is easier than carrying on an argument, and it makes him more angry than anything I could say.

Cincinnatus patted Laddie's head a few min-

utes, then he started anew: "I see that the woman suffragists are hard at it again, getting up petitions to the Legislature, and all that sort of thing. There ought to be a law which shall provide for the shutting up of these half-crazy women. I am glad to see that the number of anti-suffragists is increasing. It is no time for sensible women to sit on the fence. They ought to join the anti-suffragists. Did I tell you about that little gem I saw in a Western paper? It was in a sketch of a woman's-rights woman, who was described as 'a most aggressive womanist.' It is the funniest thing I ever heard about them. And the best of it is, it was said by one of their number. The most rabid anti-suffragist couldn't have said anything so rich."

Now I am not a woman-suffragist. Ten years ago I was ready to espouse the cause warmly, but time has taught me conservatism. I do not fly off at a tangent on any subject. But Cincinnatus never forgets those days and the papers I wrote on the woman question as I saw it then. He forgets that since that time women have gained much, and that there may be less need of agitation. Personally, I don't care to vote, tho I fail to see why I, as an educated woman and a

taxpayer, am not as eligible to the ballot as Pete, who tends my furnace, and who can neither read nor write and who doesn't own a square inch of ground.

It seems to me that there is too much voting done. If I had my way I would have less, instead of more. Still, I do not consider that my views on this subject have any value, and of late years I never touch on it in my writing. The question may be of vital importance, but it does not appeal to me. The woman question is a much wider one than that of the ballot, and I find more than enough to occupy my mind and heart without thinking of voting. I would rather give women happiness than the ballot. In the many years I have been a bread-winner I have met countless women workers, and it seemed to me that they needed happiness more than a vote. Oh, the women eating their hearts out in cold hall bedrooms in New York and other great cities! There ought to be an addition to the Litany,—something like this: "We beseech Thee to have mercy upon all lonely women in boarding-house hall bedrooms." I say it with all reverence for the magnificent ritual of the Episcopal Church.

Of course I did not say all this to Cincinnatus. What I really did say was that "both suffragists and anti-suffragists have sense on their side, and that I respect the agitators, for I believe that they follow their convictions."

"Nonsense, they want a sensation."

"No; Cincinnatus, they are not in this fight for fun. It isn't pleasant, I assure you, to be a target for man's wit, or, what is worse, for woman's. I haven't a doubt that some of these women who go about speaking in public would prefer to live sheltered lives, did they not feel called to work for the good of the race."

"Humph! What have they done?"

"I refer you to the proper authorities. There is a copy of the history of woman suffrage on my shelves, you are welcome to it. They certainly have done something toward revising the laws relating to women and their ownership of property. Lucy Stone did wonders in Massachusetts. I would not have believed that sane men could make such laws, if I had not looked them up. These laws do not touch me; perhaps if I were a married woman I should be more exercised over them. I don't know just where I stand on the

suffrage question, but I am not ready to join the anti-suffragists."

"You are anything but conservative, as I understand the word. If you are not careful you will be back where you were ten years ago. I have watched you closely, and I have been gratified to see that you were getting rid of those 'advanced' notions. I am sorry to see you taking these up again."

It was not a month before that Cincinnatus had told me, when in a very gracious mood, that I was the most perfectly balanced woman he had ever known. "You have perfect poise," he went on to say; "you are perfectly feminine, yet you have enough of the masculine element to give you the strength which a woman needs. I don't know whether this happy combination is a result of your education or of your contact with the world, but it is good to see it, whatever caused it."

I was puffed up with pride and conceit at such a dictum from such a source. So when Cincinnatus told me that I flew off at a tangent, I quoted his own words to him.

He looked perfectly blank. "I haven't the remotest recollection of saying such a thing, but of

course, if you say I said it, I did. I must have been suffering from temporary aberration of judgment at the time."

I did not expect Cincinnatus to "own up" to saying all that, and I was quite content to let the subject drop just there. I was not in a combative mood, and if I had been, there were more interesting subjects over which to fight, such as apostolic succession, Calvinism, the purpose novel, and impressionism. I would have welcomed any one of these topics, but Cincinnatus was not yet done. I leaned back in my chair and listened. Laddie left him, and came to me, as if openly proclaiming himself on the side of the peace party.

"The world is mad," quoth Cincinnatus oracularly, standing on the hearth-rug, with his hands in his pockets, the position which a man invariably takes when laying down the law to a woman. "The world has gone mad, particularly the feminine portion of it. Where are the good, old-fashioned women of our grandmother's times? —keepers at home, as St. Paul said."

"Oh, if you are going to quote St. Paul, you need not stop there. He advised women to clothe themselves with shamefacedness as well as with sobriety. My dear Cincinnatus, St. Paul looked

at the woman question from the standpoint of Oriental civilization in the first century. You are naturally expected to view it from the Occidental standpoint in the twentieth. Was it Dr. Holmes who, in referring to people who complain of the times, said that nothing looked well from behind?"

Cincinnatus chose to ignore my remark, or he chose to appear above it.

"Then you stand up for the new woman, Honor?"

"My dear Cincinnatus, there is no new woman. If there is, there always was a new one, ever since the world has been in good running order. There was Miriam, for instance, and Deborah. What a stir it must have made among the brethren when she rose up in Israel! There has always been some conservative man to raise a hue and cry because woman was going to ruin through going out of her sphere. Who has the right to settle just what her sphere is?"

"Oh, there you go again, with the regular stock phrases. You are too bright a woman, Honor, to use such threadbare arguments. Really, you don't talk as well as you used to."

"Probably because I am out of practise. I

promised myself never to argue with you on this subject. I am sorry I said a word. If you want to quarrel with me, choose some other topic." It seemed that he did not care for another battle, for he brought the chess-men, and the evening ended more amicably than it had begun.

CHAPTER XI

One of the prices which one has to pay for being even a semi-popular author, is being interviewed. This is often done by letter, as well as by a woman with a note-book. I have had my share of tribulations along this line, but I have borne them with better grace than some, for I have seen the day when I have been guilty of interviewing other women. One of these documents which are intended to gather information upon the working habits of authors lies before me. It consists of the following questions:

1. Do you write by inspiration or mechanically, producing a certain number of pages a day?

2. Do you change your work after it is written, or do you send the original copy to the publisher?

3. Do you have a regular place for work, or does the "divine afflatus" visit you anywhere?

4. Do you draw your characters from real life, or from your imagination?

5. Who is your favorite author?

6. What is your favorite book?

7. What is your favorite poem?

8. Who is your favorite character in fiction?

9. Who is your favorite musical composer?

10. What is your favorite work of art? (Painting or sculpture?)

11. What is your favorite flower?

12. What is your favorite setting for a story?"

It appears that a certain editor is collecting these important (and impertinent) data, and he politely requests me to fill out the blanks in his circular and return it to him, together with any other autobiographical matter I may care to send. This is the kind of stuff some periodicals publish and call literature.

I had no intention of sending the answers to the editor, but I spent a whole hour of one of my busiest days in filling out the blanks for my own amusement. I had never before given any thought to my method of work, and after due consideration I have concluded that I have no method. I write as it happens.

Let me take the first question. Sometimes I write by inspiration, and sometimes I simply grind out a story. Usually I have several pieces of work running at the same time. One, the favored one, I work on when I feel that I can not

leave it alone; the others I do because I must have money. The work done under inspiration is my best, in my own estimation, but it seldom meets with more favor from publisher or public than the book written at the rate of so many pages a day. If I were to depend upon the so-called inspired work, I might still be languishing in a boarding-house. No Red Roof could I build by inspiration.

Some of my books were written straight ahead, without let or hindrance, and the first draft went directly to the publisher. At other times the wheels "drave heavily," and I made draft after draft, adding to and changing each one till at last I called it done. This, I believe, disposes of Question Two.

Do I have a settled place of work? Yes and no; I usually write in the study, but I am by no means confined to my desk. All my writing paraphernalia are kept on the large oak desk which I have used ever since I began to regard my writing seriously. I write there when my story runs smoothly, but when it drags I move my base of operations to the old law desk which used to be my father's, and which stands in the centre of the study. There is room for me to rest

both elbows on the desk while I cudgel my brains as to what ought to come next. Sometimes I take a block of paper and a pencil and lie down on the couch and scribble. Oftener yet, I write on a large flat book in my lap. There are times when I can not bring myself to sit still. When I reach this stage I am apt to wander all over the house, "upstairs, downstairs, and in my lady's chamber," like the famous goosey-goosey gander. I have even invaded Leavitt's kitchen. I never write out of doors, however. There is too much to attract my attention—a white butterfly, looking like a petal from a sweet-pea, a bird, or something in the flower-garden calls me away—and my work falls to the ground. Cincinnatus works in the garden a great deal in warm weather. He has made a sort of a hop-vine bower on the back lawn, and he sits there writing on big, old-fashioned foolscap paper, as Pope or Addison might have done. Cincinnatus uses quill pens and writes an old-fashioned hand. I can't understand how he can use a typewriter; it is perfectly incongruous with the rest of his literary habits.

Number four is next. My characters are seldom drawn from real life. If they are they are

sure to be composite. I never set out to put a real character in a book, but the traits of real people are apt to attach themselves to imaginary characters.

Five asks for my favorite author. It depends upon my mood. Sometimes it is Dante, sometimes Carlyle, sometimes Marcus Aurelius, or Mark Twain, or Mother Goose.

Like five, the answer to six would depend upon my mood. It might be "Don Quixote," or "The Iliad," or "The Scarlet Letter," or "Alice in Wonderland," or "The Jungle Books."

For seven I can only repeat, as in the two preceding cases, "That depends."

Before I could answer eight I should have to know what is meant by favorite in this sense. The character in fiction which I understand best is Maggie Tulliver in "The Mill on the Floss."

My favorite musician when Cincinnatus is about is Wagner. When he is not here it is Mendelssohn.

For ten I would answer, the winged Victory of Samothrace, perhaps. I always keep a fine reproduction of it on my desk.

Eleven asks for my favorite flower. What possible good could it do the editor or his constit-

uency to know my favorite flower? I have a passion for many flowers, both of high and low degree. In some moods I love a "Jack" rose almost to death, and the first dandelion in spring brings "thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears." But take it for all sorts of days and moods, I think I like the common little nasturtium best of all. I don't mean the wine-colored or the light yellow ones, but the old-fashioned ones, with all the tints of a flame in them. My garden runs riot with them in summer and autumn, and in the winter Leavitt raises them in my south windows. I keep a bowl of them on my table almost the year around.

Question twelve asks for my favorite setting for a story. I suppose it means what local color do I prefer. There is no story setting which I like so well as the Westmoreland scenery in "Robert Elsmere."

I feel better acquainted with myself since I answered these questions, and I am grateful to the enterprising editor for sending them to me.

It is pleasant work, this writing, and I am glad I have chosen it, or it has chosen me. It is real work, tho people who can not write so much as an announcement of a church fair think that

we authors have an easy life. "You just write your article or your book, mail it to an editor or publisher, and cash your check," said Uncle Jacob. "All you've done is to sit in an easy-chair and cover clean white paper with words." So that is all my books mean to him—words. It is impossible to make him see that I do anything but play with a pen. He once asked me to write a circular for "Pollard's Patent Purifying Invigorator." He said he wanted it to sound literary, and the man who had written the former ones didn't suit him. I told him that I was very busy, that the work was not in my line, but that I would do it for a certain price, and I named what he called a stiff one. He declined to employ me at that figure, and went back to the man who was not literary. Since then Uncle Jacob has had much to say about the emoluments of writers.

Writing does not mean only mental fatigue; one's back can ache just as hard as if one held the broom or stood over the wash-tub, and then add the throbbing brain and wornout nerves, and it is fatigue indeed. The better one is writing, the faster one's vitality goes, and the more exhausted one is. But work is not so wearing as waiting for ideas, which refuse to come, while the

publisher is waiting for the story. Another tantalizing thing is to map out a story, expecting certain characters to act in a certain manner, and have them utterly refuse to do the thing expected of them. At such times the story has to be entirely reconstructed, and the ending is quite different from the anticipated one. It is exciting when an author does not know how a novel is "coming out." Cincinnatus says he can not understand this kind of writing. No wonder, when he deals with facts instead of imagination.

CHAPTER XII

I HAVE read Leavitt's story at last. I always knew she had one, but I did not suppose that it was so tragic.

She is a devout church-goer, and she attends two evening meetings each week. It was while she was at the Wednesday-evening prayer-meeting that I heard a ring at the kitchen door, and I answered it. A man, a stranger, stood there.

"This is 149 High Street, isn't it?"

"Yes; whom do you want to see?"

"Mrs. Leavitt lives here, does she not?"

Mrs. Leavitt. So this was the clue to her story!

"Jane Leavitt lives here," I said sharply, "but who are you and what do you want of her?"

"I am her husband, just out of jail. There you have it. I know enough to take off my hat when I talk to a lady, but I didn't want you to see the prison cut of my hair." He took off his hat as he spoke. I moved so that the light from the kitchen could fall on him, and I saw that he

had a dark, set face, which was strikingly handsome.

"Now that you have looked me over may I come in and wait for my wife? I don't mean to be impertinent, but I was not brought up to stand outside a kitchen door and ask for favors."

I hesitated. Not that I was afraid. I had no fear of the man, even if Cincinnatus had not been in the parlor; but I was thinking of Leavitt, and what a shock it would be for her to come in from one of those meetings which I knew brought her so much help, to find this jail-bird of a husband.

"I will go and meet Jennie, if you will tell me where to find her. I dare say she is at church. She knew that my time would be out soon, so my coming will not shock her much."

I have much regard for Leavitt, and I felt that I must make this trouble as light for her as I could. "Come in," I said, "and sit in the dining-room. I will tell Leavitt that you are here. You are not to show yourself till I have spoken to her."

The man followed me into the dining-room. "You need not fear for your spoons," he said, glancing toward the sideboard.

"I told you that I am not afraid of you."

I stood and eyed him, wishing that I could do something to prevent his ever seeing Leavitt again. "Why do you come here and disturb Leavitt?" I asked, thinking aloud. "She has grown calm and almost happy since she came to me. Go away and leave her in peace, she has suffered too much through you already."

I saw that he started from his chair. "Has she told you—anything?"

"No; I never knew of your existence till to-night. It was not necessary for her to tell me of you. She has a look in her face that tells that some man has made her life wretched. Only a man can do it, a husband, or lover, or son."

"What is it that Dr. Holmes says about having a scale of some other person's nervous system, and playing all the gamut of the sensibilities as a pianist strikes the keys of his instrument? I presumé, to alter the doctor's words a little, that I was as great a master of 'this nerve-playing as Vieuxtemps or Thalberg in their lines of performance.' 'Married life,' according to the same authority, 'is the school in which the most accomplished artists in this department are found. A delicate woman is the best instrument; she has such a magnificent compass of sensibilities.' Jen-

nie was a good instrument, and I suspect that I was an expert performer. You are a smart woman to have read all this. I thought that Jennie was too close-mouthed to talk about her affairs. You ask why I don't go away and leave her here. Because I want to see her. Evidently you think her too good for me, and so she is morally, but, my dear Miss Sharpe—you see I know your name—when I married Jennie twelve years ago, everybody thought that I was very foolish. My family was much better than hers, and as for looks"—he straightened himself and glanced into the mirror over the mantel—"I think that you will acknowledge that, notwithstanding this prison style of hair-dressing, I have the advantage. I don't know why I wanted to marry Jennie, but I did want to marry her. I suppose I have no idea what a hell—I beg pardon—I made of her life. I see by your expression that you would enjoy seeing the earth open and swallow me, but, unfortunately for Jennie, such things do not happen nowadays. Perhaps I deserve to have it happen, but I feel safe in affirming that it won't. You may think me a trifle fresh for a man just out of prison, talking to a lady in this free and easy fashion in her own

house. And a very charming house it is," he added, glancing about the room. "The truth is, it is so long since I have talked to a lady that——"

"Don't be impertinent," I said sharply. "I have a high degree of regard for the woman you call your wife, and I shall not stand by and see you trouble her. In some States the fact that a man has been in State's prison frees his wife from him."

"It is not the case in Jersey, and we are in Jersey, you remember. What do you propose to do in case I make trouble for my wife? I see you wince at those last two words."

"Make a nuisance of yourself and you will see what I will do. She will be here in a moment. It is a quarter-past nine, and the meeting closes at nine. I don't wish her to be shocked by your coming, poor woman! I wish you to sit quietly here while I tell her that you have come. Then if she will see you you may stay till ten o'clock. As the clock strikes ten you will leave my house, my grounds, and——"

"And go where?"

"I don't care," I was about to say, but I checked the words. "Have you any money?"

"No; I had a little when I came out of prison,

but I used it to get here. I haven't had anything to eat to-day, and, as you just remarked, it is after nine o'clock."

"Why didn't you tell me that you were hungry, instead of saying so much that was unnecessary and impertinent? Leavitt may get you a luncheon. Or, no, I will give you a bit of a luncheon now. Every moment counts when a man has had nothing to eat all day. And as for a night's lodging, I'll manage that."

I went to the refrigerator for a glass of milk, and brought bread and butter. He rose to take it from me, and, tho he eyed the milk like a ravenous animal, he drank it daintily. I had to admit that he had many marks of a gentleman.

A step on the snow warned me that Leavitt was coming, and I went into the kitchen, shutting the dining-room door behind me. Leavitt closed and locked the kitchen door. I had asked her to go and come by the front door, but she would not accept any privileges not granted to an ordinary servant. She was humming "Dundee," evidently one of the hymns sung at the meeting. I noticed how well and happy she looked; her eyes had an unusual brightness, and her cheeks were red, a healthy red, from her

walk in the winter night. How could I tell her that her husband sat in the next room? I had to do it, however, and I fear I did it poorly.

"Leavitt," I began, "Leavitt."

"What is it, Miss Sharpe? Something has happened. You are pale, and you tremble. Something has happened to Mr. King?" She grasped my arm, as if to support me.

"No; he is in the parlor, reading. But, my poor Leavitt, my good friend, the trouble is yours. A man who calls himself your husband is in the dining-room. Tell me that he is an impostor, and I will have Mr. King put him out of my house."

It was her turn to shake now. She sat down before the fire and tried to warm her hands. "So soon, so soon," she kept repeating. "I thought I had three months more of peace."

"Then it is true, Leavitt?"

She bowed her head.

"And all he told me of his cruelty, of your suffering, is true?"

She bowed assent again.

"Then why—there is no reason why you should bear any more. Free yourself."

"No; Miss Sharpe, I married George Leavitt for better or for worse. 'What God hath joined together——'"

"Let not woman put asunder." Leavitt's husband finished the sentence for her.

"Pardon me, Miss Sharpe. You ordered me to be out of your house at ten sharp, and as my time was rapidly going, I ventured to see what was going on and found you trying to influence my wife to leave me."

I did not reply to him. Turning to Leavitt, I said, "I will see him before he goes. Oh, yes, please give him something to eat."

Leavitt had not looked up yet, and I saw her hands tremble as she held them out before the blaze.

As I closed the door I heard the man say, "Poor girl, my poor girl!"

To go into the parlor was like going into another world. Cincinnatus sat before the leaping, glowing wood-fire, in the most comfortable chair in the room. I took in the details of the room, as a stranger might have done, for I had lived through so much in the last half-hour that I felt like an alien. The firelight fell on the open piano, the rows of books, and the old blue china in its

polished cabinets. All my belongings meant so much to me, I felt so safe, so sheltered, at my own fireside. And who was I to have a home and firelight and friendship, while that woman in my kitchen, with just as much right to happiness, had nothing but misery for her share? Even this bitter cup of agony must be drunk under another's roof. She had no home in which to hide her mortification.

I walked up and down the room, nervously touching the familiar objects. I felt that I never could be quiet again. Cincinnatus looked up from Lyly's "Euphues," upon which light and recent literature he was regaling himself.

"What makes you so restless, Honor? Do sit down and enjoy this blaze, and let me read to you from Lyly."

"I am in no mood for euphuism to-night. Leavitt has a husband, just out of jail, and he is in my kitchen with her this minute."

Cincinnatus seized the poker and poked the fire, a thing he always does when excited. "What? what?" he repeated. "You are sure that you are right?"

"Sure? I have been talking to him for the last half-hour. What can we do with him? I

can't let Leavitt go away, and I am speaking more for her sake than mine, for she has been content with me."

"You always insisted that she had a history, and that it was a history that only a man can write on a woman's face. Poor Leavitt! We must think a way out. I will do anything you say, Honor. Your woman's intuition is quicker than mine, but I'll follow you."

The "Euphues" lay on the rug, forgotten, tho it was a very rare copy which Cincinnatus had secured only the day before, and over which he had been gloating, like the born book-lover that he is. He took his turn at walking the floor. His head was bent over his breast, and his hands were in his pockets, signs that he was in deep thought.

"He is a rough man, of course, and Leavitt has outgrown him."

"On the contrary, he is a gentleman, born and bred. He quoted from Dr. Holmes, and he actually patronized me, calling me my dear Miss Sharpe."

"Why didn't you call me?"

"My dear Cincinnatus, you and he would have come to blows at once. It was all I could do to

keep myself from ordering him to leave the house."

"I think you should have called me. I haven't the privilege of being your legal protector, but I always supposed that you would call on me when you need me."

"I would have called you if I needed you. I told this man what I thought of his free speech. Now what can we do with him? He has no money, for I asked him. I will send him to one of the hotels for the night, but, for Leavitt's sake, I prefer to have no one know who he is. She may stay here, and if she does she will not want curious tongues wagging about her affairs. I hope she will let me talk to her about him, but, in the mean time, we must dispose of him for the present."

Cincinnatus stopped his walk. "Nothing could be easier. I will take him home with me. He shall have the west room, and——"

"What will Mrs. Barton say?"

"My dear Honor, I hope I am master in my own house. Several times before you have hinted that Cousin Joanna ruled the roast—how often that saying is misquoted by using roost in place of roast—but I assure you that I am master, as

I said, in my own house. By the way, what was the origin of that expression?"

"But this man, the convict," I cut in, for if Cincinnatus once got running a word or a saying to cover, there was no telling when he would get back to the subject in hand, "suppose he won't go with you? It is nice and generous of you to offer to take him, but suppose he won't go?"

"But he will. I shall ask him as I should ask any gentleman," and Cincinnatus at once assumed his society manner.

"He won't be caught in that way. He knows that you know that he is just out of jail. Better not make any pretense that you don't understand him. "I'll go and find Leavitt and see what she says."

It was ten, and I went into the dining-room. The man was sitting before the kitchen table. Evidently he had finished his meal. Instinctively I knew what he wanted next—a cigar. I was almost tempted to ask Cincinnatus for one, but the next moment I smiled at my folly. Leavitt came in and I said, in a matter-of-course way, "Mr. King has offered to take your husband home with him to-night."

"Mr. King is very kind. It is best for George to go with him for to-night. I am sorry to bring this trouble upon you and Mr. King."

"I am sorry for your sake only. Mr. King is ready, and perhaps you would better ask your husband to go now."

Just then Cincinnatus came in, and the two men eyed each other for an instant. Before I could get my wits together enough to think whether an introduction was the proper thing, I heard Cincinnatus saying, "This is Mr. Leavitt, I suppose. Miss Sharpe tells me that you will let me put you up to-night. My house is next door, and if you are ready we will go. Good-night, Miss Sharpe. Good-night, Mrs. Leavitt."

"Bless the man," I thought, as I looked through the window and saw Cincinnatus hold the gate open for his guest to pass through. I need have no fear of Mrs. Barton; Cincinnatus would be equal to the occasion.

Leavitt went to look at the furnace; then she busied herself with preparations for breakfast. She set the sponge for the rolls and covered it up; then washed the potatoes for baking. There was something pathetic about her, as she moved about, taking thought for my comfort. I longed

to say something to show my sympathy, but I dared not. I pretended to read the evening paper, but I imagined she knew that I was not reading.

As she started to go upstairs for the night, she said: "Miss Sharpe, I owe you an explanation. Perhaps I did wrong to come here and represent myself as an unmarried woman, but if I had said that I was married you would naturally have wondered where my husband was. So I called myself Jane Leavitt, and you naturally thought that I was Miss Leavitt. I was tired of teaching, and I was glad to be with you during these few months before George would be free. I did not intend to have this unhappy affair take place under your roof. I had no reason to suppose that George would be free so soon, but it seems that good behavior has shortened his term by three months. He was sentenced for forgery. I meant to leave you before his term expired and go with him to some place in the West where we could begin life anew. I have saved my wages for that purpose. I was about to tell you that I must leave you soon, but I have been so happy here that I dreaded to face the thought of leaving. I am sorry that I did not go before George came;

this is a poor return to you and Mr. King for all the kindness you have shown me."

"Don't think of that. Our share of the trouble is nothing. I am glad that you have been happy here. Why should you leave me? Perhaps your husband will wish to go away again."

"It is best for him to be with me. Perhaps if I had not left him this last—trouble would not have happened. I went away to teach, for something had to be done. We could not starve," she added, as if speaking to herself.

"Miss Sharpe, I love that man. I couldn't leave him if he tried to kill me. I am like clay in the potter's hands when I am with him. He knows his power over me, and he counts on it. We must go away. He may promise to leave me in peace, but he will come back here when it pleases him to do so. When I was teaching he came and went, and I lost more than one school because people would not put up with his—ways," poor Leavitt added, after a moment's hesitation. "He will not work, at least he never sticks to anything, and yet he is capable of filling almost any position. He is a highly educated man; he has had every advantage, while I had to pick up my education as I could. Oh, I must go away

with him; I could not be contented here, if he were roaming about the country, perhaps getting into more mischief. I have lost all my pride. I would be content in a cabin, and I would live on the plainest fare if I could depend upon him."

"But a man can't forge all the time," I said, wondering what were his other accomplishments.

"Intemperance and gambling," said Leavitt, as if answering my thought. "No doubt you noticed that he has a gambler's eye. Despite all I have told you and more which I have kept to myself, I love this man. He has come back to me and I will stand by him. Perhaps God will give me his soul in answer to prayer."

I could say nothing to comfort her, so I said good-night and went upstairs. As I made ready for the night in my comfortable room, the contrast between Leavitt and myself came before me again. A homeless woman with a worthless husband! But what was that to me? I had worked for what I had. So had Leavitt worked; it was not her fault that she had no roof to call her own. I went to bed, but not to sleep; I kept wondering how I could help Leavitt reform her husband. Those words, "I was sick and in prison and ye visited me," came back to me again and

again. If it was enjoined upon us to visit those in prison, it must be even more necessary to help a man just out of prison. What is there for an ex-convict? Who will employ him? The idea that I ought to help him kept thrusting itself upon me till I accepted the mission, tho I had no idea how I should set about it. As it turned out, Cincinnatus showed me how.

Assured that I could not sleep, I went into the study. I would read a while till I became sleepy. I opened the most prosy book I could find and stretched myself on the couch. I was soon attracted by footsteps overhead. Was Leavitt ill? I am up more or less every night, thanks to my inherited insomnia, but I supposed that Leavitt slept the night through, like a sensible person. I would go and ask if I could do anything for her. As I came near the door, I heard the words which have been repeated by countless anguished souls since David first uttered them in his despair: "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee." There was silence for a moment, then Leavitt went on: "Are the prayers of years of no avail? Have I not given up all for his soul? Have I kept anything back? Or did I grow secure when he was in prison and could do no harm? Forgive

me, if for a little I forgot to wrestle in prayer for him. Forgive—"

It occurred to me just then that I was eavesdropping; but I excused myself to myself by saying, as I went downstairs, that I did not listen from curiosity. I went back to my book, knowing that I could not minister to this sort of illness.

In the next house the ex-convict was sleeping as the just under my roof could not sleep. Mrs. Barton is the authority for the statement that he read a French novel till twelve o'clock, then slept "like an angel." She knew, for she listened at the keyhole and heard his regular breathing. From the same point of vantage she saw that he was reading, tho she did not know till the next morning what the book was. It was "Madame Bovary," a book which one of Cincinnatus's guests had left in the room.

When Leavitt brought me the cup of black coffee, which is my first want in the morning, she was outwardly calm. Her breakfast was as perfect as usual, and we did not mention her husband.

Cincinnatus came over soon after breakfast. I had just gone up to the study, and he sat down in the hall and waited for me to come down. He

began to speak of his errand at once. "What do you think of our trying to keep George Leavitt and giving him something to do? You must not lose your housekeeper, and I imagine that you and I may have considerable influence over this man. He is in my study at present, taking my typewriter to pieces. From what he told me about himself at breakfast, I imagine he can do almost anything; that he is a sort of a jack-at-all-trades. It occurred to me just now that if we could keep him busy with your lawn and my lawn, your horse and my horse, it might be the making of him."

The aristocratic George Leavitt as stableman and gardener! I could not imagine it. "But, Cincinnatus, would he do such work?"

"Certainly. He would rather potter around at something easy than to be denned up at some regular business. I believe there is a good deal of gipsy in the man. Besides, if he did want to go to work here in town, I dare not recommend him. I can see how hard it must be for a man just out of prison to get employment. If people would do something to put ex-convicts on their feet and help them get an honest living, it would do more good than sending them tracts before

they leave prison. I would like to give this fellow a chance. Of course, there is some risk about our employing him, and perhaps you would better not take it."

"I will take any risk that you will take," I said, somewhat nettled. "Does he understand horses?"

"Oh, yes; I am satisfied that he understands almost anything. Then we will give him a chance? Pete, as you know, is getting careless, and I have thought for some time that it would be well to make a change. I don't believe that this Leavitt is a bad fellow at heart. He spoke very freely to me of his failings, which appear to be drink and gambling. He told me that he is a born gambler, and his father was before him. The propensity to drink is inherited too, I fancy. He told me, when I proposed to keep him, that he is liable to have what he calls a spell at any time, but that he never forgets that he is a gentleman. He is a queer compound, and I begin to find him interesting. You know the crime which sent him to prison? Forgery. He says he hadn't a cent to his name, and the temptation and the opportunity came together. Poor fellow! I am glad, Honor, that you think we should give him

a trial. The next thing is to see what your Leavitt thinks about it, and perhaps you would better do that."

Leavitt turned pale when I laid the plan before her. After a moment she said it was much better than she and George had any right to expect. "If George can only be trusted," she added.

I assured her that Mr. King and I assumed all risks, and I went back to my work in the study, feeling quite relieved.

When I was ready for my afternoon drive, George brought my little bay around to the door. The buggy was immaculately clean, and Bonnie's glossy coat shone more than ever. George gave me the reins with a courtly bow, and I drove away, feeling that my turnout was all that it should be. A mile or two from town, I met Cincinnatus on horseback. He turned and rode beside me for a while, so that we might discuss our new factotum. Evidently George had won Cincinnatus's heart by praising Rob Roy, his saddle horse. Cincinnatus is extravagant about horses, but altho he keeps three, he always says "my horse," meaning Rob. I don't know whether he does this out of consideration for me because I have only one horse, or whether he is so fond of

Rob Roy that he ignores the very handsome pair of cobs which he occasionally drives.

Cincinnatus left me at a cross road, and on my way back to town I met George, exercising the cobs. They were in high spirits, for they had not been out for several days. George managed them very well indeed, and I was glad to be able to tell Leavitt that Cincinnatus and I were pleased with his work.

CHAPTER XIII

GEORGE gave perfect satisfaction at first. The spring work on both places was well done, and he took particular pride in the lawns. So far as Cincinnatus and I knew, he was perfectly temperate for two months; but, as Cincinnatus said, he might drink without our knowing it. Many of his evenings were spent in my dining-room in looking over the current magazines which I made a point of leaving there for him. Cincinnatus and I gave him the use of our libraries, and the fellow proved to be as much of a bookworm as either of us. There was no doubt about his being an educated man. Altogether, he and his wife were as peculiar people as ever masqueraded as servants.

Cincinnatus soon made him more useful by setting him to translating French for him during his leisure hours. Cincinnatus had come in from a drive one day to find George sitting on the stable steps, devouring my last *Revue des Deux Mondes*. By the way, Cincinnatus had not heard

of the midnight reading of "Madame Bovary." He accosted George in French, and was surprised to find his accent perfect. "Where did you pick up that French?" Cincinnatus asked.

"At Harvard, with a native professor, and later in Paris in the Latin Quarter. I studied a few months in Julien's atelier."

"Is there anything you haven't done?" was Cincinnatus's next question.

"Not much, I fancy," laughed George, as he led the horses away.

Every day brought to light some new fact in George's history. Cincinnatus and I made him the theme of many conversations. We were prepared to have him backslide, for the present state of affairs was too good to last. I could not tell whether Leavitt was contented or not. She was very quiet, and I dared not, of course, ask her whether she liked to have George about. I guessed that she was nervous lest he should be overcome by one of his old temptations, and I fervently hoped that he would behave himself, not so much for my own sake as for Leavitt's.

It was nearly three months after George came to us that Leavitt came to my study-door one day with a white, set face. "Miss Sharpe, I was

afraid of this. Pete has just come, and he says that George sent him because he had to go away. George said nothing to me, but I just found this note tucked under the kitchen door."

"It's no use, Jennie. I've behaved as long as I can, and I must have my fling. It will probably be a big one, for I have gone without any for so long. Don't feel any worse than you must, poor girl. George."

Leavitt gave the note to me, and went away. Her only comment was: "We should have gone away. This was bound to happen. I might have known, but I hoped——" She did not finish the sentence, but turned away.

I sent Pete to tell Cincinnatus that I wanted to see him. I did not know why I sent for him, but it was my first impulse. "George is gone," was my greeting.

"I expected that he would go, didn't you? There is only one thing to be done, that is to go after him. We must save that fellow in spite of himself. Besides, we can't let you lose your Leavitt."

It was like Cincinnatus to add this, for fear he would be caught doing a good action.

"I don't see what you can do now. Of course, if he comes back we can give him another trial, but I very much doubt if he ever comes back."

"There is only one thing to do, as I said—bring him back." Cincinnatus looked at his watch. "I think I would better go down to the station and see if I can find any trace of him. Tell Leavitt not to be discouraged."

I saw nor heard nothing of Cincinnatus for three days. Pete informed me that he was out of town. Mrs. Barton, Pete added, was as cross as a witch, because she didn't know where he was.

As I sat in the parlor on the evening of the third day, I heard the bell ring, then Cincinnatus's voice telling Leavitt that George was back, safe and sound, and he would be over in a few moments. Leavitt's voice was broken as she tried to thank him, poor girl.

Cincinnatus came in and shook hands in a matter-of-course way, just as if he hadn't been away for three days, playing good Samaritan. "The wanderer has returned, Honor," he said, dropping into his favorite chair, and taking up the tongs.

"Where did you find him?"

"I tracked him to Newark. That was easily

done, for the ticket-agent remembered him. I guessed that I should find him drinking and gambling, and I did. It took a good while to find him, and my experiences would make a book. He had evidently had part of his 'fling,' judging from his looks. But he was nearly sober then, and he was playing poker, playing a masterly game. He rose and introduced me to his 'friends.' Oh, he was very polite, and he was very complimentary to me. He said he would ask me to take a hand, but he knew I am partial to whist, and he was sorry that I do not consider poker a gentleman's game. I got him away as soon as I could and got him safe in a hotel, but not till he had had several parting glasses with his 'friends.' By the time I got him locked in a room at the hotel he was as drunk as a lord. Pardon me, but nothing else will express it. He was still very polite, and he discussed the currency question with great fluency and with more sense than many a man who has all his wits about him. Really, the affair would have been almost funny, if I hadn't remembered your Leavitt. I gave George time to come to himself, then I started for home with him. He is very apologetic now, and very grateful to me for giving him another

chance, but he will go off again and have his fling. He knows it, and he knows that I know it. Well, I'll go after him; that is all there is of it." And Cincinnatus dropped the subject.

George took up his duties again, both indoors and out, as if there had been no break. Leavitt wore a chastened look, as if she and not George had been the culprit. I was glad to have George back, even if sure that he would leave again. For the sake of my work I must have peace of mind, and between Leavitt and George my *ménage* ran on smoothly. I realized that this calm was too good to last, and I held myself prepared for anything.

Leavitt again expressed a wish to leave and take George with her. I told her that Cincinnatus and I did not wish George to go, that we would rather have him with all his drawbacks than any one else without them. Besides, it was much better for George to have this restraint upon him. I added that Cincinnatus and I had accepted George as a mission, and we meant to make a man of him, with her help. It was a hard thing to say, but I felt that I ought to tell her that her distrust of George was hurting him. She must act as if she thought it impossible for

him to fall again. She thanked me, and never again expressed a wish to leave me.

The task which we, but especially Cincinnatus, had undertaken—to make a man of George, in spite of himself—was no sinecure. Sometimes he acted like a pattern of all the virtues for weeks at a time. Then Leavitt's face would lose its anxious expression, and Cincinnatus would think the struggle over, when, without any warning, George would disappear. Cincinnatus never failed to go after him, and in more or less time he would return with the culprit, who would be in a state of sorrow for his sins, and all would go smoothly again.

We believed George to be strictly honest, with one exception. The wines on Cincinnatus's sideboard had a mysterious way of disappearing. Now Cincinnatus is the most temperate of men. He drinks a glass or two of wine at dinner, because his father did it before him, and it had never occurred to him that a dinner-table could be furnished forth without wine. But one day he remarked to me that he had emptied the decanters and locked up the wines. "I have been thinking about George," he said. "No doubt it is a temptation to him to have the wines on the

sideboard. He is obliged to pass through the room several times a day, and I have decided to do without wine, that is all. I won't have it on the table. I don't believe I care enough about it to miss it, and it is a case of 'if meat maketh my brother to offend,' you see."

I did see, and I liked Cincinnatus the better for it. Leavitt knew that he had banished his wines, and she spoke of it to me with thankfulness. Her only objection to having George with Cincinnatus was removed.

Cincinnatus soon saw that it was a waste of good material to keep George busied with horses and lawns, and he took him into the house, where he occupied a position which was a combination of private secretary and butler. He waited on the table, kept the accounts, and manipulated the typewriter with equal skill. There seemed to be nothing which George could not do. Did the electric bells in either house get out of order? He "fixed" them. If one of the horses was sick, George prescribed for it, instead of sending for a veterinary surgeon. The range in my kitchen refused to draw, but George conquered its intricacies. The lawn withered, but George knew what it needed. He "tinkered" clocks and sew-

ing-machines and typewriters successfully. Cincinnatus sent him to New York on the most particular errands, which were always well executed. He could market as well as Leavitt herself, and he quite won Aunt Frances's heart by matching worsteds perfectly.

Cincinnatus often felt that the man was wasting his life, that he should be doing something better. He told him so, and offered to help him to a suitable position, for he now could feel justified in recommending him. George always said that he preferred to stay where he was. His work was interesting, and he had time to read, and a good horse to drive when he liked. Cincinnatus felt that he had done his duty, and George stayed on.

How much George was to blame for his moral delinquencies we did not pretend to say. If we were not tempted as he was it was no credit to us. The difference between people is largely a matter of circumstances, and we could not tell what we would have done if placed where George had been placed. "The greatest of these is charity."

CHAPTER XIV

PAUL is coming home. It is strange with what calmness I write these words. He is on his way now. He wrote me from Berlin that he would sail in a week, or sooner, if he could settle his affairs. It is ten years since I have seen his writing, and it has changed so that I opened the letter with the Berlin postmark without dreaming that it was from him. The letter ran thus:

"DEAR HONOR:

"I am going home. It is time, is it not, dear heart? You can not write and forbid my coming, for before this letter reaches you I shall be on the sea. Do you long to see me as I long to see you? Forget these wasted years, this exile, which, if I had known, was quite unnecessary. I think of you as I saw you last, standing by the old gate of the orchard. Do you remember? Oh, I know you remember! PAUL."

After many days! I should be glad and thankful and go singing about the house, as befits a woman whose lover is coming home. I

should have a new light in my eye, and a flush on my cheek, and my step should be buoyant. It is always so in novels. But there is no such change in me; I feel older than ever before. Can it be that I do not want to see Paul? It is unnatural; I will not admit it. It is the possibility of change which troubles me. My life was running on so smoothly, and now the foundations of all things are shaken. Nothing is solid under my feet. I am restless; I can't write. I almost hate my house. Cincinnatus can not understand me, and only this evening we quarreled so that I fear he will never come again. It was all my fault, too.

. . . . . .

Every hour brings Paul nearer. Will he expect to find me wearing a white dress and a blue sash? I wore them when he saw me last, by the south gate in the old orchard. He must have that mental picture of me, for I can see him only as he looked then. Of course we can not see each other as almost middle-aged people. I doubt if we would know each other if we met by accident.

Maud, who is visiting me, thinks it all very romantic. I told her that I was expecting an old friend, and she jumped at the rest. It seems that

her mother had told her about my romance. Maud wonders that I was never married, for even now, she says, I am not bad-looking. She, with her twenty summers, can not forbear to patronize me, with my forty winters. But I can make allowance for the arrogance of youth; like beauty, it is its own excuse for being.

Altogether, I feel that Maud treats me very well; better, perhaps, than I should treat her if our ages were reversed. I can remember when I used to think that a woman of thirty had nothing left to live for. As for forty, my wildest flight of imagination could not reach so far. So I can forgive Maudie for patronizing me. But I wish the child were not here just now. I have all the shyness of a girl about meeting Paul, and I am afraid of Maud. I can imagine how she will smile at us middle-aged lovers. But she came to Red Roof to stay a month, and I can not send her home, much as I wish her there.

. . . . . .

Cincinnatus came over this evening, like the forgiving soul that he is, and we had a good, quiet evening, for Maud was out with some young people. I suppose I would go with her if I fulfilled my duty; but I hate to act as chaperon, and I

find it impossible to sit up nearly all night to watch Maud dance, tho I often sit up all night to write, if driven by an inspiration. So I sent the child in the care of a good woman who has a daughter of her own, and went back to Cincinnatus.

A bit of embroidery, I think it was originally intended for a doily, lay in my work-basket. I picked it up and took a few stitches, to Cincinnatus's great delight. He loves to see me do something which he calls other-womanish. He drew his chair closer, and watched me make something which was supposed to be a clover leaf. I believe he is prouder of that doily than of any of my books.

We talked on a variety of subjects for a while, then Cincinnatus rose and paced the length of the parlor, a habit of his when anything is on his mind. After he had done his mile—it is well that I don't worry about the wear on my rugs—he stopped and spoke abruptly.

"Honor, do you believe in presentiments?"

Usually I don't, but his question made my heart jump. I answered it by another one. "Why?"

"Oh, because, as the children say."

He took up a book and put it down, then took up another one, in absent-minded fashion, not with his usual lover-like touch.

"I can't help feeling, Honor, that something is about to happen. What it is I can not imagine, but I find myself looking about this familiar room, where I have spent so many comfortable evenings, and wondering if they are to come to an end."

"I can't see what could happen," I said, and I meant it. Even if Paul and I should become all in all to each other, Cincinnatus would still be Cincinnatus.

I don't know what Paul's coming means, but from his letter I must think that he takes it for granted that we are to meet on the old footing. Maud asked me if we are engaged. I parried the question. We never were engaged to be married, but we promised each other that we would marry no other man or woman. It was easy for me to keep my promise, for I never saw any other man whom I wanted to marry.

"Forget those wasted years, this exile, which, had I but known it, was quite unnecessary." Then there was some mistake, there was no reason why we should not have married. "Some

one had blundered," either intentionally or unintentionally. Could it be that Aunt Maria——? No, she was not cruel, not wittingly cruel. She is dead, and let her faults lie buried with her. I would much rather think that she was conscientious in her use of the story of the insane grandmother and the "peculiar mother." Paul and I were children to be scared by bogie stories; we should have investigated his family history for ourselves. If, then, we were sure that there was that black drop back of Paul, it was time to unclasp hands and put the width of the world between us. And yet, I sometimes think that if I had my life to live over I would marry where I had given my heart, and leave the result to God. I have heard too much of heredity—Paul in Russia and I here all these years, because of an old wives' tale, which, no doubt, was twisted in the telling. I am not bitter against those who spoiled our lives, but I am alone, and I miss what might have been.

But perhaps what might have been was not to be. I can comfort myself with that thought. I believe that "all things work together for good." Not that each thing works for our good, but the sum of all things. So I doubt not that, seen in a

stronger light, this lonely life of mine has been for the best. "For now we see through a glass darkly."

. . . . . .

Paul came yesterday. I went to meet him, or, I intended to meet him. I had a telegram in the morning, saying when he would come. Maud saw the messenger, and guessed what his message was. She was so glad that Paul had arrived. She was simply dying to see him. I had intended to send her for a drive to get her out of the way.

I dreaded the meeting more and more, as the day wore on toward three o'clock. I fear I spent most of the time in my own room, gazing into the mirror, and that did not add to my happiness. I locked my door on Maud, who was inclined to be very sociable, thereby getting myself called cross and crabbed. Behind the lock and bolt, I got out old photographs of myself and ranged them before me. Had I looked like that at twenty? I had never called myself a pretty girl, but at this distance I did. It did not seem a vain thing to say, for it was as if I were talking of another person. Compared with the face I saw in the mirror, it might have been another person. The

very contour of the face had changed, so had the expression. Honor, at twenty, looked out on the world with wide, eager eyes, longing to grasp the heritage belonging to youth and good looks. The face in the mirror showed that she had grasped but little, and that had to be grappled for. Still, there was a look which I was bound to respect. It showed thought and endurance, triumph over self, and content with what fortune had sent me.

The eyes were good gray eyes, with a suggestion of blue in them. The teeth were as white and perfect as Maud's own. The features had never been any too regular, but the mouth and chin commanded respect. Yes; I liked my mouth and chin. The hair, which was a reddish brown when Paul went away, had grown darker, and begins to show some gray. So much for the face. As for figure, I am five feet five inches in height. I am as straight as I was at twenty, tho not so willowy, owing to my one hundred and fifty pounds. But, as Anastasia often tells me, my adipose tissue is well put on, and I always dress well. I want my gloves and shoes to fit, and my hats to be becoming. I like good clothes, and I have nothing in common with the old idea that a literary woman must be shabby. Once my

clothes are bought and made, they do not worry me. It is only ill-dressed people who are conscious of their dress.

How would I look to Paul? was the question which haunted me all that morning. One does not notice the change in one's self, it comes about so gradually, but it might be a shock to Paul. I must wait and see.

Maud was full of questions at luncheon. Did Cincinnatus know about this old lover of mine? Why hadn't I married Cincinnatus years ago? This man from Russia didn't deserve to be waited for. Hadn't we even seen each other's photographs in all these years? How funny! Did I suppose I would know this man when I saw him? Was he rich? And so on, till I felt like shrieking out. Not one of my most intimate friends would dare ask me such questions, even if they had the desire, yet I would not let this young inquisitor know how she tortured me. She should not know that I was abashed before her, and that I had suddenly grown old.

When I went to dress for the afternoon I took out several gowns. Not that I had not already expended much thought upon the gown I should wear, but I had not decided the question. Gray

had been Paul's favorite color, and I had worn it a great deal during his last summer. I put on a gray gown at last, tho I felt that it was the most unbecoming thing I could wear.

The train would be due in a few minutes, there was no time to change now. I put on my hat, not the broad-brimmed, flower-trimmed thing which I wore when Paul last saw me, but a hat befitting my twoscore years. I have not come to tie-strings yet.

I slipped out of the back door, and hurried down the garden walk. Paul must pass my back gate on his way from the station, and I would let him into the garden, so escaping Maud's lynx eyes. I did not know where she was, but I guessed she was watching for Paul's arrival. Now that it was too late, I wished that I had driven down to meet him.

The train was in, for the passengers were coming up the street. There were several people whom I had never seen before. One man, a trifle stout, of a fine presence, something like Cincinnatus, came with a quick step. I decided that he must be Paul. But no; as he passed my gate he bowed to one of the townspeople. Perhaps Paul had not come, after all. What a silly thing

I was to stand at the gate, like a girl! Paul would probably be in on the next train. I remembered that there are two sections of the 2:33 train; Paul had taken the slower one. I stooped to pat Laddie, who will never let me get out of his sight, even on such a momentous occasion as meeting an old lover, and went to look at the chrysanthemums. George had done well with the garden. The lawn and flower-beds had never looked better. It was a pleasant little spot, this house and garden of mine. I looked up at the house. I loved it even more than usual then. It was all I had in the world to show for my life-work. I would never leave it, even if——

Cincinnatus came to the fence and called me to look at his dahlias. They were larger than mine, and I acknowledged the fact. He gave me a large bunch of red ones to put in the dull green jar on the dining-room chimney-piece. He always tells me what sort of a jar or vase to put his flowers in, and where to set them.

Cincinnatus seemed inclined to talk, but I had my mind on the train. It came in, and the passengers passed the gate as before, but there was no stranger among them. I went into the house, stopping in the dining-room to put my dahlias in

water. I heard a voice in the parlor, Maud's voice, shriller even than usual. My niece's voice is the most underbred thing about her.

"Oh, yes, she will be here in a moment," she was saying. "And you haven't seen each other in all these years? How strange! And you haven't any idea how she looks, or she how you look? How funny!"

Clearly, Paul was here, and Maud was already asking him impertinent questions. I moved about the dining-room, so she would hear me.

"Leavitt?" Maud called. "Aunt Honor?" She came to the door. "Oh, it is you at last. Here is your friend, safe and sound. I was down at the station, seeing Lillie Mead off, and I heard him ask the way, so I piloted him here. We came around through Oak Street, because I wanted to show him the house from the front side. Cincinnatus—I suppose you want me to say Mr. King—was in the front yard, and he looked as if he thought I had a beau."

"Maud," I gasped at last, "I wish you would not be so flippant. You should have called me. I will see Mr. Richmond now."

A tall, thin-faced, dark-complexioned man rose from Cincinnatus's chair. If I had met him

when not expecting him I should not have connected him with Paul in any way. As I crossed the room, I found myself wishing that he had chosen some other chair.

Maud says we were very stiff. She probably is right, for she followed me in. In a few moments Paul and I were talking Russian politics, tho I can not remember what led up to that subject.

Maud left us after a few moments, but looked in again to say that she was going to play golf. She had changed her street dress for her golf suit, and she looked very well indeed.

"A very charming girl that niece of yours is. Let me see, she must be John's daughter. Of course, Merry died. She looks as you used to, Honor. I almost forgot when I first saw her that—so many years had passed," Paul added lamely.

There was a pause for a moment; then the man who called himself Paul Richmond said, "I suppose we have changed; it is no more than natural."

We had changed, but how much I had not realized till then.

"You have been successful," Paul went on,—"a

successful literary woman. I always knew that you were meant for distinction, but I did not know along what line it would be."

"I fear I can't lay claim to distinction, but I have had a moderate success. I enjoy this work as I could enjoy no other. I imagined that you would write."

"I? No; I have done nothing but think tea for ten years. I never want to hear the word again. I have wasted my life, Honor."

"Oh, I hope not," I replied awkwardly. "You couldn't be yourself and not think of other things besides business. And you must not talk as if your life were over; a man of forty-two is a comparatively young man yet. Now that you are at home again, you will soon find yourself taking your old interest in art and letters."

He shook his head sadly. Forty-two! He acted like sixty-two. Cincinnatus, cutting dahlias in the next yard, was a giddy youth beside him. What was the matter with Paul? I kept asking myself. Was his spirit broken? He acted like a broken-spirited man. Perhaps, however, it was only his health that was broken.

Our conversation dragged along. It was chiefly upon Russian matters, and I was glad to keep

away from personal subjects. To me this was not Paul, but a half-sick, querulous man just from Russia. I could manage to talk to the man from Russia so long as I could forget that he was Paul. "You won't mind if I ring for tea?" I asked. "I often take it of an afternoon." It was not that I wanted tea, but anything for a new topic.

Making tea is a most domestic performance. I saw that Paul seemed interested as I busied myself with the cups. As he rose to take his cup from me, I noticed how weak he seemed. "Sit still, Paul, and let me wait on you." I spoke the words as if I meant them, and a faint flush came on his cheek as he smiled.

"That sounds natural, Honor. How you used to 'marm' it over me. It seems good to know that any one cares about me. I am a poor excuse for a man, dear. Bear with me if you can, till I am myself again. I am a poor sailor, and I was very ill at sea. Besides, I have been wretched for some time. I dare say I hurried too much about settling my affairs. Have I said that it seems good to be here? It does. Some day I want to tell you a long story."

"When you are able, Paul; not now. You

must think of nothing but getting well, for it strikes me you are a sick man. Where are you staying in New York?"

"With my cousins, the Hetheringtons. You remember them, I suppose?"

"Yes. And are you perfectly comfortable? Have a physician at once. Don't let yourself run down any more. Life will look very different to you when you are strong again."

"You are strong, Honor. Don't despise me for being such a poor creature."

"I tell you you are a sick man. Who talks of despising? Let me take your cup."

"I must go back. It has been good to see you again, Honor. But everything seems so strange. Somehow, it seems that our positions are reversed. The man should be the stronger vessel. May I come out again soon?"

"Come whenever you like. I had intended to keep you to dinner, but I will not urge it."

"No; it is best for me to go back early. Tomorrow I have business, but I will see you on Friday. Oh, Honor, give me one or two of your books. I will read them and try to get acquainted with you before we meet again."

I ran up to the study and looked over the closet

which I devote to my own books. I selected a novel and a volume of short stories.

Paul put them in the pocket of his overcoat and thanked me. Just then George drove into the yard.

"Wait, Paul," I said, "and I will drive you down to the station. It isn't a bit of trouble, for the man has the horse at the door."

Cincinnatus was still pottering about the garden as I drove past. He looked up and gravely raised his hat. I knew that he would wonder why I had not told him of the coming of this friend.

We met Maud coming home from the golf links, walking between two young men, while two unattended girls walked behind. I smiled, it was so like Maud. No doubt she was enjoying the unequal division of escorts.

Paul smiled and raised his hat with alacrity. He seemed quite waked up at sight of Maud.

"Going so soon? Why didn't you keep him to dinner, aunty?" Maud asked, as if she were lady of the manor.

After Paul's train left I headed my little horse for the country. A good, brisk drive would help me straighten out matters. Bonnie was nothing

loth, and I let her choose her own pace. We were five miles from home before I realized it, and the little horse dropped into a walk. I turned and drove slowly home, while I thought of Paul, the new Paul. I had lost the old one, and this pale, querulous man, what I had to do with him I could not tell.

When I drove into the yard Maud was standing on the porch. "I think it quite time you came home. I began to think that you and Mr. Richmond had eloped."

"I drove him to the station," I said, in a matter-of-fact tone. There was no sense in letting her know how she annoyed me.

"I told Cincinnatus about your old beau," said Maud, as we sat down to dinner. "I asked him if he didn't think it a very romantic affair, but he acted as if he were jealous."

"Really, Maud, you must stop talking over my affairs. I hoped you had better taste."

"Oh, come now, aunty, don't fly into a rage. It was only Cincinnatus. Or is that where the shoe pinches? Really, Aunt Honor, I don't think that you should appropriate both beaux; you should give one to me."

"You seem in no need of what you are pleased

to call beaux. I saw you walking between Ned Harlowe and Tom Wynkoop." I was foolish to say that, but I knew the remark would draw her attention from my affairs.

Maud laughed. "And how mad Nelly Sykes and Blanche Ward were at my gobbling both boys up! I know they said hateful things behind my back, but I didn't care. I know that my new golf suit fits to perfection, and I know also that Nelly's is a made-over one. I told Tom Wynkoop so."

"How spiteful you are, Maud! I am ashamed of you. Girls were not so hateful when I was young."

"Oh, you dear, innocent old thing! Let me think what you did and how you looked when you were my age." Maud had drawn her chair near mine by this time, and was sociably eating her dessert. "You didn't play golf, of course, and it was too early for tennis to be the rage. Croquet! That is it. You played croquet, and you wore—let's see, twenty years ago—you wore hoops and flounces and a little bit of a round hat tilted over your nose like this," and Maud demonstrated with the now empty dessert-plate. "And you wore a big waterfall of false hair. Ugh! horrid!"

"You are ten years too far back in the fashions, Maudie. Not that I mind, but you may as well be accurate."

"Yet I dare say that you were a very good-looking girl," and Maud helped herself to grapes. "Only you missed half your life by not playing golf. Oh, I forgot. The whist club meets here to-night. What can I give them? Something nice, please."

"Ask Leavitt. It would serve you right if she refuses to give you anything. You should have told her before."

I shut myself in the study and spent the evening staring into the fire. The weather was mild, and there was no excuse for a fire, but I wanted a blaze for company.

CHAPTER XV

PAUL comes out about three times a week. I have not yet decided whether or not I am glad to see him. He is much better, and he acts, to quote Maud's words, as if he meant to brace up. She still tortures me. I wish I had known of Paul's coming in time to postpone her visit. Her month will be up in a few days, but she seems to have no intention of going home. I heartily wish she would go.

Cincinnatus comes over very seldom now. I miss him. It isn't exactly complimentary to him, but I miss him as one would miss the cat. He always is by the fire, like a cat. When I do see him he is more considerate than usual, and that makes me feel strange. Altogether, I am having a peculiar time.

Cincinnatus has only once referred to Paul. The two men have never met, tho Maud, I fancy, has kept each one well posted about the other. I was down-town one day last week, doing some errands, when Cincinnatus drove by. He pulled up the horses and waited for me.

"Come for a drive, Honor. The cobs are in fine trim, and I hate driving alone."

I took the seat beside him, and away we flew. We said little for the first mile or two, then fell to chatting much as usual. We spoke of George Leavitt and his last fall from grace, and we agreed that his services were so valuable when he was himself, that we could afford to put up with an occasional disappearance. George was considerate enough to engage Pete before he left, so we were never without a man. We had been over this ground many times before, but we felt that we must talk about something.

Suddenly Cincinnatus turned to me. "Honor, are you going to marry that man?"

He did not look at me after he had spoken, but seemed absorbed in studying his whip-handle.

I did not ask what man, to gain time, as a younger woman would have done. I told the simple truth. "I don't know, Cincinnatus."

He spoke to the horses, and they covered the next mile quickly. "Do you remember Browning's 'Last Ride Together'? 'Since all my life was meant for fails,'" he repeated, half under his breath, and more to himself than to me. "Honor, good friend, I will not trouble you with more

questions. The best that can come to you will always be my wish for you. One thing I ask, if you decide that you will not marry the man from Russia will you tell me?"

"Yes, Cincinnatus, I will. I am perplexed; everything is strange and untried. Listen, I loved this man years ago, when I was Maud's age, and I have loved him all these years—the man I knew, not this new one. I don't know my feelings toward this man. I am as silly as a girl of sixteen, and I can't help seeing how ridiculous it is."

"I fail to see anything ridiculous about it. If it will do you any good to talk the matter over with me, I can stand it, I think."

"Thank you, Cincinnatus. Perhaps I may talk to you more freely later. Meantime, I am glad of your sympathy. And I am glad that you don't think this middle-aged affair ridiculous. A woman would, I fear. No matter how much a woman thinks of another, at a time like this, she finds herself counting wrinkles and gray hairs."

"Wrinkles? Nonsense! You talked most sensibly about Milly Seymour's marriage, and regretted that a woman should cheapen herself because she has lost some of her youthful bloom.

If a man has brains he wants brains in his wife. I would rather marry a woman as ugly as George Eliot if she had brains, than a young, pretty—fool."

And I sometimes thought that he liked Maud.

"Beauty and bloom are all well enough, but a man wants something more opposite him at breakfast, dinner, and supper, three hundred and sixty-five days in the year. I don't know how Mr. Richmond regards this question. If he has come back expecting to find you looking like twenty, of course he is disappointed. I happen to know your age, and I think you look about what it is; but every year has added intellectual graces, and, to my mind, the beauty of mind and soul exceeds that of youth. If this man sees all this, my life will be the poorer."

"I don't see why. I fail to see why I should give up my friends if I should marry. We have been friends so long, Cincinnatus."

"For twelve years. I was working on *The Mirror*, and you came as the new fashion editor." —Cincinnatus does not say editress unless he is quarreling with me.—"At that time I had a prejudice against newspaper women, but I liked you

at once, for you looked sensible, and you did not ask any favors because you were a woman. Something told me that we were to be friends. This friendship has grown to be a part of my life, and I can't bear to think—Honor," he broke off, "don't marry that man unless you love him enough to justify it. I know that your standard is high. Don't be deceived by the idea that because you were once engaged to him you must keep your promise to marry him."

"My dear Cincinnatus, I don't know that he wants to marry me. We meet simply as friends and we are getting acquainted with each other. I wrote him a note after his first call, telling him that we are to remember nothing in the past except that we were friends. I wish you would come over and meet him. Will you come to a little dinner next Thursday, and run in to-night as usual? Aunt Frances is with me, and she wonders why you do not come."

"I will come, thank you. I will do anything for you, Honor, if I am sure you really want it done, even to giving you away if you must marry this Richmond man. Could I say more?"

"I can't think of anything funnier than your

giving me away. Besides, I am not a church woman, as Anastasia would say. I shall expect you this evening."

Aunt Frances had just arrived for her semi-annual visit. Maud still lingered, tho she usually manages to avoid Aunt Frances. Why Aunt Frances came just then I could not tell, unless the fates had a large grudge against me. A match-making, elderly aunt was the one person whom I did not want about at that time.

After dinner I spoke to her of Paul, saying in a matter-of-course way that he had come back.

"Is he married?"

This is the question that I have heard about every eligible man since I was sixteen. "No, he is not married," I replied.

"Humph! Is he rich?"

"I really do not know."

"Why did he come back?"

"He hasn't told me. I imagine that he had a natural desire to see his own country again. Russia is a long way off."

"You have held your own pretty well, Honor," said my aunt presently, apropos of nothing in particular. "How is Mr. King?"

"Very well, I believe. He will probably be in this evening."

"He still comes, I suppose, and sits around and quarrels with you about music and books. I should think you would make a match of it if you are so fond of each other. It would save running two houses."

Aunt Frances makes this remark every time she comes, so I was not surprised. "Oh, Cincinnatus and I could not get along with less than two houses. Yes; I believe I am fond of him, in a way."

"When I was young, to be fond of a man meant a great deal. If a girl was fond of a man, she naturally wanted to marry him."

"Time brings changes, it seems. I can unblushingly state that I am fond of Cincinnatus, yet I have no desire to marry him. Here he comes now."

He greeted Aunt Frances, then gravitated toward his favorite chair. He seemed to belong there much more than Paul did, tho he invariably selects that particular chair. Laddie left the rug at my feet, and went over to Cincinnatus, as if to tell him that he had missed him. Maud was out, no one called, and we spent a very quiet evening.

Aunt Frances knitted on one of her endless afghans, while Cincinnatus read to us from one of Marie Corelli's books, at Aunt Frances's request.

Cincinnatus, who seemed to be in a particularly gracious mood, had asked Aunt Frances if he should read aloud, taking up "Henry Esmond" as he spoke. He guessed that if he did not read we should be obliged to play dummy whist, for Aunt Frances is an inveterate whist player. She thanked him, and sent me up to her room to get a "most charming book" out of her bag. I was prepared for something which would be a trial to Cincinnatus, but I did not know that I was going to take him "The Sorrows of Satan." However, he plunged in manfully. I enjoyed the book very much, for Cincinnatus managed to read so that I could guess the comments he wished to make. When he rose to go, Aunt Frances put a scrap of red worsted in the book to mark the place, and thanked him graciously, adding that he might read again the next time he came.

My dinner passed off without what Eunice used to call "a hitch." The dinner itself was as perfect as Leavitt could make it, and George waited on the table. No butler, a retainer in some old family, could have done better than George. It

was Cincinnatus who discovered his talent in this direction.

I wore a new evening gown and dressed my hair in the most becoming fashion. I felt quite young and giddy, much as I imagine Maud must feel when walking between two admirers, as I introduced Cincinnatus to Paul. "Mr. Richmond, may I present my neighbor from over the way? Mr. Richmond is another old friend," etc. Maud was delighted, and she told me in a stage whisper that it was very romantic, and I could be perfectly splendid when I chose.

It was quite a dinner party, for Anastasia was there, and Rosalind and her husband, who, it will be remembered, is a ritualistic clergyman. There were some elderly people asked for Aunt Frances' sake,—a retired Presbyterian minister and his wife among the number, and some young people to bear Maud company. It was the first time I had seen Paul in company, and he seemed quite alert for him. I had arranged the places so that Cincinnatus might have a good opportunity to study him, which I think he improved, tho he seemed to be absorbed in a discussion with Rosalind, whom he took out, about a new so-called literary magazine. Anastasia, who sat opposite,

looked across the table as if she wanted to have a hand in the fray. The ritualistic clergyman took out Maud's particular crony, Betty Hyde. She was lovely in pink chiffon, and she explained golf to him in such a charming way that he said he must learn to play, whereat Rosalind was much edified. The elderly people discussed various topics. Aunt Frances and the minister's wife exchanged admiring tributes to Marie Corelli, and Aunt Frances remarked in a voice which was heard all over the dining-room that Mr. King rendered her works beautifully. Anastasia, I regret to say, wore a look of unholy triumph. The young people were deep in athletics, while Anastasia, who had fallen to the retired Presbyterian minister, discussed with him such safe topics as the recent capture of missionaries by brigands and the menace of anarchism.

Anastasia stayed with me that night, and as both guest-rooms were occupied by Aunt Frances and Maud, I took her into my room. We usually talk till all hours when she stays with me, but instead of chatting she brushed her hair, took the things out of her bag, and brushed her evening gown. Then she sat down on the hearth-rug and regarded me with a long-suffering expression.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I'm sleepy. I supposed I came here to go to bed, but you sit there in that very becoming evening gown, musing over the fire, like a young girl with two lovers. I wouldn't give ten like the other one for Cincinnatus. I almost loved him this evening, tho he doesn't begin to be as handsome as Paul. If you marry Paul I'll marry Cincinnatus, that is, if I can get him, which I very much doubt."

"I never thought that you really liked Cincinnatus."

"I never did till to-night, but comparing my sentiments for him with those regarding Paul, I think I may truthfully say that I adore Cincinnatus. He looked like an angel to-night with a white carnation in his buttonhole. A white carnation is just the flower for him. It is as sweet as the actions of the just, and as prim as a white-necktied church-warden with Presbyterian leanings."

Cincinnatus is a church-warden, by the way, but I don't think he has Presbyterian leanings.

"What is your objection to Paul? I want to know why no one likes him."

"Because you don't like him, and we are afraid

that you will make yourself think you do. Drat old love-affairs! There, I have said it. How can two people meet after a separation of twenty years and expect to have any ideas in common, especially when one has been thinking literature and the other tea? Shall I tell you what I think, Honoria Mary Sharpe?"

"I asked you out here to tell what you think."

"I think that it is your pride which makes you cling to this old affair. You feel that because you once loved this man you must keep on loving him, or cheat yourself into thinking that you do. If you allow yourself to change you will feel that you are cheapening your life. Isn't that about it?"

"Anastasia, I don't know. You see through every one else; I don't know why you shouldn't see through me."

"Still," Anastasia went on, as if I had not spoken, "still, I think you will marry Paul, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless he finds out that he wants some one else, which is 'a consummation devoutly to be wished.' That would take the affair out of your

hands and solve everything. Now I am going to sleep. Don't say Paul to me again to-night."

It was some time before I had an opportunity to ask Cincinnatus's opinion of Paul. Cincinnatus came to make his dinner call in formal fashion, but Aunt Frances was there, and I could not say anything. It was over a week after the dinner that Cincinnatus and I touched on the subject, over the fence. I called him, ostensibly to share my first celery with him, and I said, "You have an opinion. Let me have it."

He shook his head. "I can't read character."

"But you have an opinion."

"Naturally, my opinion can not be an unbiased one."

"I don't see why it shouldn't."

"I don't understand the man, and it would be unjust of me to form any opinion upon such a short acquaintance. Only, I can't imagine you two belonging to each other. You don't seem to belong, as the children say. He is ill, and you will, I fear, think you ought to marry him and take care of his cough. If you do you will spoil a good literary woman to make a poor wife."

"Then you really think that I would make a poor wife?"

"You would if you married him." With which oracular saying, Cincinnatus dismissed the subject and began to talk about seeding the bare places in his lawn.

Evidently there was no comfort to be had from Cincinnatus. Anastasia had said that if I married Paul it would be to prove to myself that I could be true. Her words rang in my ears, and threw more light on my own feelings than anything which had been said or I had thought on the subject. I decided that I would stop thinking and let the whole affair drift. Perhaps Paul would not want me to marry him, and I was conscious of a curious lightness of heart as I contemplated such a possibility. I was tired of my own psychology. It was time I went to work; I am never so happy as when absorbed in a story. So I put a fresh blotter on my desk, filled my inkstand, and began a new novel.

CHAPTER XVI

PAUL came yesterday and had a long talk with me in the study. It is a mark of especial favor when I admit any one to that room. Even Cincinnatus only occasionally gets his head in. But Paul came while Aunt Frances was entertaining callers in the parlor, so I took him to the study.

He has been coming and going ever since my dinner. Sometimes we have sat in the parlor and talked, sometimes I have taken him for a drive. We have discussed many subjects, but we never spoke of love till yesterday afternoon. My mind has been at peace since I stopped my introspection and went to work, and it is a comfort to know that my story bids fair to be as good as usual. Time settles all things, and I felt sure that it would bring this affair to a happy issue. If ever I have been thankful for an optimistic temperament, and settled habits of work, I have been lately.

When Paul came into the study I knew that

we were to understand each other at last, and I was glad.

"So this is the place where you think out your stories," said he, walking about the room to gain time.

I wanted to open my mouth and say, "Paul, I know what you want to say. You need not mind telling me that you do not want to marry me, for I do not want to marry you." But I couldn't say it; no woman could. I must wait and let him fence till he was ready to speak. I felt each moment more and more that I ought to help him. It must be hard for a man to tell a woman that he does not want to marry her. I tried again, but my lips could not frame a word. So I waited.

Paul stood at the window, his back toward me, when he began in that almost querulous voice—I never could live with that voice—"Honor, don't you think it time that we talked over—some things?" he added lamely. "When I first came back you stopped my mouth, but now——"

Even with this opportunity I could not help him. After all, why should I? I found myself forgetting all personal concern in the matter, and taking a novelist's interest in the situation, which certainly was an unusual one.

"Yes; it is time," Paul repeated, fussing with the curtain. Then he came back into the room, took a chair by a table, and began to play with a paper-weight.

"When I came home I had no idea but that we would take up—that we would go on as before. I was full of bitterness because of our wasted years, and I hoped that the time left us would atone for much. You must have gathered as much from my letter."

I nodded assent.

"When I met you, you seemed like a stranger, tho you were kind, and I realized the breach that the years had made. No doubt my first visit was as uncomfortable to you as it was to me. The next morning I received your very sensible note, telling me that we were to be friends and nothing more till we knew what we wanted. That message put me at ease.

"To go back to the reason for my coming home. I found that the story of the insane grandmother was pure fiction. I told you so much, I think. I met a cousin last summer, while taking a vacation in the Tyrol. When I wrote my name in the hotel register, I saw that his name was the same as mine. I cultivated

him, and found that we are distantly related. We talked of the family history, and, to my surprise, he knew nothing of the insanity which was supposed to have been handed down for several generations. He knew that there was a peculiarity, however. When he went back to Boston he looked up the history and satisfied me beyond a doubt as to the sanity of our race."

The story which Paul told, with many circumlocutions and much halting, was substantially this: His grandmother received a terrible shock before the birth of his mother, which was no less than seeing her husband killed before her eyes by a vicious horse. She was never herself after the event, and because she would never speak of it, and because she spoke of nothing if she could avoid it, she was called insane by the neighborhood. During a severe attack of neuralgia she took an overdose of morphine, whether by accident or design was not known. This happened soon after the marriage of her daughter, Paul's mother. The daughter became a morbid woman, but she was by no means of an unsound mind. She brooded over the idea of inherited insanity till she lost the edge of the horror, and kept up the ghastly advantage it gave her in deal-

ing with people who were afraid of "agitating" her.

As to Aunt Maria's part in the story, I am not quite clear whether she knew these facts and deliberately put them out of focus for grave reasons, such as that Paul's mother bought her preserves, and had her stockings ironed wrong-side out, or whether she shared the ignorant apprehensions of "the neighbors." To scantily educated people a little science is a dangerous thing.

All this Paul told me as he walked up and down my study. A year before, had I known that this was to happen, my heart would have bled for self-pity, but now—should I be ashamed to say it?—it seemed to concern me only from the point of view of the novelist. I waited for the next chapter.

"That is the story, Honor. The past is past and we can not call it back. But if the devotion of the rest of my life——"

His tone nettled me, and I did not let him finish the sentence. Who was this Paul Richmond who presumed—I used the word in my thought—to offer to help me piece out my life? Was I a woman to accept the remnants of a man's affec-

tion and "put up" with it? I who had stood alone and needed no man's support? I am as proud at forty as I was at twenty, and I realized it then. I could speak, at last.

"Paul, don't, I beg, say any more. As you say, the past is gone and we can not call it back. The future has nothing for us together. You do not love me, and I should like you better if you were brave enough to come and tell me so. As for me, I loved you once, but that was in another life. I do not love you in this life. No; don't speak till I am through. I want to settle this once and for all. Never insult me again by offering what you can not give."

He turned red, then white, then back to red again. "But, Honor, this—this is ghastly."

"It is not. It is natural and right."

"No; it is not right. Why, we are cheap creatures, you and I, if we can't be true to ourselves and the old affection. I wonder that you can't see it."

"Paul, be sensible. We have grown apart during all these years, a perfectly natural thing. I wonder only that I expected anything else. I have seen all this clearly for weeks, and I thought that a clearer vision had come to you. You love

another woman, and I sincerely hope that you will be happy with her."

He started as if I had struck him. "Why—how—what?" He stammered so that I wished I had not been so abrupt.

"How do I know, do you mean? What have I been writing stories for all these years if I can't read a real story when it is being lived before my eyes. Who is she, Paul? You need not mind telling me."

"It is Maud. I—that is, she doesn't know. I know she is much younger, but there have been happy marriages with even greater disparity, and if you are sure that I owe you no duty——"

"Don't mention that word to me again. I warn you."

I noticed that every word added to his courage, now that the worst was over, and he soon ceased to stammer. So it was Maud. Paul had availed himself of his masculine prerogative of stepping out of his generation. I was not entirely surprised. Maud is just the girl to charm a man who is a little world-weary. I had considered the possibility of Paul's caring for her, when he first began to come to my house, but I did not think that she could ever care for him, unless it

were to flirt with him in the absence of a younger man. She had gone home, and that did not indicate any interest on her part. If she had wished to stay she would have found a dozen good reasons for doing so, even to getting her physician to say that her health demanded an indefinite residence at my house.

"Of course," Paul was saying, "I don't know that your niece would consider me in the light of a lover, but naturally, I had no opportunity to find out the state of her feelings toward me."

Was there a self-satisfied expression on his face, or did I fancy it?

"You may remember that she met me at the station the day I came, and I thought her charming. I have thought about her more and more every day."

I remembered that meeting, and I had always had grave doubts about its being unpremeditated, so far as Maud was concerned. Poor Paul, I began to be sorry for him. He would find it no light task to fill the position of Maud's lover, as more than one youngster could testify. She had flouted and tormented them all. A young man might stand it, but how could Paul bear it? I wondered if I ought to help him.

While I was considering whether I ought to do anything or not, Paul spoke with as much ardor as one would expect from a younger lover. "I want to see her. Will you help me? I don't know whether to go to her home, or to wait till she comes here again. When I consider the possibility of her marrying another man while I wait, I——"

"Paul, I am going soon to visit my brother. If you like, I will find out in a roundabout way how the land lies. I am by no means sure of the wisdom of these unequal marriages"—he winced at that—"but you probably know what you want. As for Maud, her father and mother will take care of her. If you have the success you wish, I shall be your aunt."

We both laughed at that. I had not heard such a hearty laugh from Paul since he came back, and I liked him the better for it. Once his mind was relieved, he acted quite naturally, and we had a pleasant chat. I drove him to the station, and we parted with a hearty handshake.

How does it seem to be a woman and to realize that you have just been told by the love of your youth that he no longer loves you, but that he is in bondage to a younger, fairer face? It is a

most comfortable sensation, I assure you. I felt free once more; I was my own mistress again.

I drove for a while after leaving Paul at the station, then I went home to dress for dinner. The dressmaker had just sent home a new gown; I put it on and wore it to dinner, to which I did ample justice. Cincinnatus came over in the evening, and we played duets till it was time for him to go home. I fell asleep as soon as my head touched the pillow. Clearly, I had not even the semblance of what Anastasia would call a Pang.

CHAPTER XVII

When I moved into my house I told myself that I would never go away to spend a night. I kept this resolution almost to the letter, to the offense of my sister-in-law Emma, Maud's mother. When I told Paul that I was about to visit my brother, I had an urgent invitation from him and his wife hanging over me. I would go and placate Emma and John, and find out the state of Maud's feelings, if possible, at the same time.

Leavitt packed my bag with necessities for three days, and Cincinnatus drove me to the station and saw me off with as much ceremony as if I had been going to California instead of to another Jersey town, two hours' ride from my own.

I found everything as usual when I reached John's. The house had a primness which would have delighted Aunt Maria. Emma was the same careful, prudent, tedious Emma with whom I could never get on. Not that we ever had any unpleasantness, but we might have had if I had not continually and firmly refused her and John

when they urged me "to make my home" with them. As if I could make my home under any other roof than my own! John had not changed any more than Emma; he was John Sharpe, a solid business man, and as uninteresting a specimen as could be found in his state.

One inmate of the house was changed, and that was Maud. "Is the child ill?" I asked. For she was pale and thin, anything but the pert, plump, pretty Maud who had left me a month ago. Emma admitted that she was worried about her, for she did not act like herself. She moped in her room, and did not care to go out, a most unusual thing, for Maud never was one to stay in the house. Emma complained that she did not eat, tho she cooked dainties for her with her own hands, and John ransacked the markets for delicacies to tempt the appetite of his pet. Where Maud was concerned, John found that he had a heart.

I guessed that these good, practical people had no idea that anything was ailing Maud that could not be cured by sweetbreads or quail on toast. I had an inkling of what the trouble was, and I meant to follow up my clue.

I expected that Maud would come to my room

at night for a talk, as she always does when at "Red Roof," but she did not come till the third night of my stay. More than once I had started to go to her, but I waited, sure that she would come to me.

When she did come she rapped timidly; it was very different from the bold thump with which she was wont to announce her nightly visits. I made her welcome, and we brushed our hair together while I began to gossip about everybody in my town, young and old, to see if she would evince any interest. There was a possibility that the recent engagement of Tom Wynkoop, one of her old admirers, might have some connection with her low spirits.

So I said, "I suppose you know that Tom Wynkoop and Clara Young are engaged?"

"Oh, yes; I heard it. Tom told me before I left your house that they were as good as engaged."

No cause here for pale cheeks. I took another plunge into gossip. "Have you heard that Ned Harlowe is paying marked attention to Bessie Sykes?"

Maud laughed. "Bessie is welcome to him. I don't want him, tho I don't mind telling you that he asked me to marry him."

"And Paul Richmond, I suppose we may hear of his engagement some of these days." I spoke abruptly, and Maud turned a little pale about the mouth.

"I supposed that—— Are not you and he engaged? I thought you were as good as engaged years ago."

"So we were, but we are not engaged now. We found out that we did not care for each other, and we were sensible enough to talk it over. But Paul Richmond will not remain a bachelor. I shouldn't be surprised if he were to marry quite a young woman. It would be a strange choice for a middle-aged man, would it not?"

"He is not middle-aged, Aunt Honor."

"He is forty-two."

"That is nothing. A man hasn't any sense till he is thirty-five. I always liked Cincinnatus better than half the young men I meet, and Cincinnatus doesn't begin to look as well as Paul—Mr. Richmond. Cincinnatus, or Mr. King, as I should call him, is too stout and florid."

"Florid? Why, child, he is blond. And so far as figure is concerned, Cincinnatus is much better-looking than Paul. Paul is too thin. I suppose that makes him so sallow. He was a

very handsome young man, and I can't understand why he is not better-looking now."

"I think he is very distinguished-looking," said Maud, beginning to braid her long hair. Evidently she wished to dismiss the subject.

I finished my visit and went home. I was as glad to get back as if I had been away a year, instead of a week. Paul came out very soon, eager as a boy, to know what I had found out. I told him nothing, beyond the fact that Maud understood that we were not engaged. I had my own opinion of the state of her affections, but I did not intend to share it with Paul. There must be no haste in this matter. To me the idea of marriage where there is so much disparity is distasteful. I could not marry a man of sixty, and yet the difference between forty and sixty seems less than that between twenty and forty. Paul must be patient; Maud should not be hurried into a marriage with a half-sick, middle-aged man. I should not so much have minded her marrying Cincinnatus, altho he is two years older than Paul, and at that age every year counts. Cincinnatus is a cheerful, well-poised man, and his digestion is better than Paul's, which Maud may find means a great deal.

I had been at home less than two weeks when I had a letter from John, saying that he was coming to bring Maud to me again. He hoped she would not be in the way, for she was very anxious to come. She was happier with me than anywhere else. She was so run down that he could not bear to refuse her anything, so he was coming without waiting for my consent. I did not know what to do. It did not seem wise to tell John the truth; he is the most obtuse of men, and it is hard to introduce a new idea into his head. Besides, if he thought that Maud wanted to marry the Shah of Persia he would at once take measures to get him for her. I wished that Emma had come with Maud instead of her father, and I decided to send for Emma to make me a visit very soon, and then tell her and wash my hands of the whole affair. So I let John go back home without mentioning the matter which was causing me so much anxiety.

Maud seemed well content as she settled herself in her old room. She brought the usual array of pretty things, but the prettiest things belonging to her, her red cheeks, she did not bring. She had an obstinate cough, she explained, and the doctor thought it best for her to come back to

me. She would be quiet, she would not pull the house about my ears this time. She refused all invitations on the ground that she was not strong enough to go out. The sleighing was excellent, and I had promised John that I would make her drive with me every day, but my horse became lame and I could not keep my word. However, Cincinnatus took her out behind the cobs every morning.

Paul did not come out till Maud had been with me several days. I would not send for him. It was plain to me at once that Maud loved him. Her eyes—Maud's eyes, which had made many a would-be suitor quail—went down before his. I knew then how it would end, and I began to wonder what I should say to the child's father and mother. I told Paul plainly that he must be very sure of himself before he declared himself. He promised everything, like an ardent, middle-aged lover, and straightway broke his word.

We played whist a good deal during those evenings, Maud and Cincinnatus and Paul and I. I would not allow Paul to spend an evening *tête-à-tête* with Maud. She played so poorly that Cincinnatus often lost his patience. He plays a masterly game himself. After the rubber we

would have cakes and coffee, German fashion, and then for a little while I would talk to Cincinnatus or we would have music, while I allowed Paul to have Maud to himself.

"Do you mean to let this go on?" Cincinnatus asked me one evening, as he bent over me, under pretense of turning my music.

"Can I stop water running down-hill?"

"Then you realize what it means?"

I nodded.

"And you are not—Honor, you promised to let me know if you made up your mind not to marry him."

"So I did, and I failed to keep my promise. It was not necessary to proclaim the fact that he didn't want me. The blindest mole might have seen what was going on."

Cincinnatus made some kind of an ejaculation. To this day I don't know what it was. It sounded like "Thank God!" but it may have been something entirely different. I did not ask him to repeat the remark.

It was two days later that Maud came in from a walk to the post-office. Exercise, or something else, had given her a fine glow, and she looked like her old self. In a moment I saw that her

color was not due to exercise, for Paul followed her. She flew upstairs, and Paul came to meet me.

"I know you will scold, but I couldn't help it. I ran out because the day was so pleasant, and I overtook Maud. She was surprised to see me, and she trembled like a leaf, poor child. I said what any man would have said under the circumstances. I was right, years make no difference. Love is greater than all barriers."

I did not stay to listen to his rhapsody; I wanted to go to Maud. No doubt there was a frown upon my face, for I thought Paul had been too precipitate. It was then that he did a chivalrous thing, which would have been unworthy of Pete, the ex-furnace man.

"Honor, you are sure that you don't care because I—you know you told me that you would not——"

I hope I did not put in my answer half the contempt I felt. Oh, Paul Richmond must have changed to ask a question like that!

Maud was lying on her bed, sobbing in a broken-hearted way that made the tears come into my eyes. I saw that it was best to be very matter-of-fact, so I began: "Now, Maud, be sensible

"Do you mean to let this go on?"
Cincinnatus asked me one evening.

and tell me all about it. What has Paul Richmond been saying to you?"

"Hasn't he told you? He said he would. Oh, I love him, and I can't have him taken from me. That is why I have been so unhappy all these weeks, because I did not know—what I do know now. How could I know that he could care for a little goose like me? I can hardly believe it, even now."

"It is a good deal to believe that a man of his age would expect to marry a girl of your age," I said coolly, sitting down on the bed.

Maud sat up and looked at me in astonishment. "I didn't mean that at all. He is so much wiser than I—and to stoop to take me!"

"Nonsense, Maud. For a girl who has flirted ever since she was ten years old, you are very humble. How many times have you been engaged before?" I counted on my fingers. "There was Ray Barnes and Louie Kellogg, and Wilson Van Neste and Harold Brown, and more, for all I know."

There was a gleam of triumph in Maud's eyes, tho the mouth was drawn down. "Oh, they don't count. This is very different."

"I should think so—twenty years different."

"What is twenty years' difference? I would marry Paul if he were eighty."

"Maud, do you realize that when you are in your prime Paul will be an old man. He is old enough to be your father."

"I don't care, I love him. I don't see why you will not let me be happy; you don't want Paul yourself."

"Don't be silly, Maud. You can see how I am placed. I am not your mother, but I am in her place while you are with me, and I feel a responsibility about you. Paul should not have spoken to you while you are here. He promised me he would not be so precipitate."

"I think you are cruel. Every day of this uncertainty was breaking my heart, and now because I am happy, you send me home."

"Maud, don't be so dense. You understand me, so does Paul. Your engagement should take place under your father's roof. I feel this particularly, because it is a peculiar case."

"Papa and mamma won't care. They would let me marry any one if they knew that I would be happy."

"That is assurance enough."

"Then you don't think that I shall be happy with Paul?"

"I did not say that. All I am insisting on is that I did not wish the affair to take place under my roof. Paul should have spoken to your father first."

Maud laughed. "You are so old-fashioned. I have been engaged several times before, and papa never knew anything about it till it happened."

"Nevertheless, I wish you to transfer this affair to your father's house. If he and your mother are satisfied about it, you may come back and stay as long as you like. Surely that is a reasonable request for me to make."

Maud took herself away the next day, with Paul in attendance. I dreaded to see the postman come, for I did not know what Emma and John would say to me. After a few days I received a very complacent note from Emma, announcing Maud's engagement to Mr. Richmond. Of course, he was considerably older than the dear child, but she had never cared for young men, and she had, as I knew, broken several engagements because she found that her heart was not sufficiently involved. Mr. Richmond was

wealthy, and he was so devoted to Maud that the whole affair seemed providential. She trusted that I would never be sorry for my generosity in giving Paul up to Maud, and finished by advising me to marry Mr. King.

I dropped the letter into the grate.

CHAPTER XVIII

ANASTASIA has been restless all summer. I have had many letters from her, and as she is the laziest of correspondents, this is a sign that something is brewing. I hold myself prepared for anything, even her nuptials, tho I have no idea who the man would be. Anastasia does not encourage anything along the matrimonial line. She says she has no vocation for matrimony, tho she admits that she would like to be a widow, which sounds heartless, to say the least.

Her letters this summer have been so enigmatic and mysterious that I am prepared for any surprise. I remember that just before she left for Maine, she remarked that if she ever married she would marry a widower. When I inquired why, she said she certainly wouldn't marry a young man and be a youth's companion, and she wouldn't marry a bachelor of her own age, for they are sure to be spoiled, so there is nothing left but a widower.

The following cheerful paragraph is a specimen of Anastasia's letters.

"'Blue devils' doesn't begin to describe the state of my feelings. To crown everything, I had to go and read 'The Mill on the Floss' over again. I thought it would divert my mind, but it must have made me absolutely maudlin, for I cried the eyes nearly out of my head. The book never affected me so before; I have always come out of it with that calm, evensong—strictly Protestant evensong—sort of feeling, a sense of the sacredness of any human affection, of the preeminence of duty as we can best see it, that George Eliot usually leaves with me."

I can't imagine Anastasia crying over a book; she must be in love. I shall tell her that it isn't wise to reread books when one has the blue devils. It is like crossing an old trail, and she ought to know that Kipling says that is not wise.

The next letter has this passage, which does not suggest matrimony. "I wonder if I am one of the left-over people as regards personal ties, who ought to make themselves part of an organization, lest they dry up into hopeless individual selfishness?"

I wrote at once: "Are you harping at that old

idea of joining a sisterhood?" For I had heard of this before.

There was no mistaking Anastasia's reply:

"I believe that the conditions brought about by our present social order and our economic disorder require extraordinary remedies, of which we have none; that the wholly inadequate remedial agencies we have—beneficent organizations of every kind, but especially those that give personal service—are entitled to all possible support from everybody who has a gleam of the religion of humanity, to say nothing of a better religion, and that they are further entitled to the bodies and souls of those who, like myself, have not vital and personal ties in ordinary life. I mean, in short, that as an individual no one really needs me, spite of euphuism, and that if a sisterhood or order of deaconesses could use me, that is where I belong."

This was worse than the possible widower. I wrote and told her that she had the blues, and that she could not look at anything in its true light, and by no means was she to write letters to any such organization till I had seen her. Anastasia is a little afraid of me, I think.

The next letter made no reference to the sister-

hood. It was full of domestic matters, and it closed with the following:

"There is a delightful Scotch Presbyterian minister here. I think I must have mentioned him before. He speaks in a soft, slow way, with a slight accent, and he looks like a Calvinist saint—supposin' you had 'em—and he thrashed a young ruffian, a regular bully, the other day. He tells me the most delightful tales about Nova Scotia—that is where he comes from, tho the original Gaelic is only one generation back—about the beautiful scenery around the Bay of Fundy and the strait of Canso, and about the Scotch people who live there, with their old-country speech and customs intact. They have ghosts and bogies, and they see the devil in the guise of a black dog. Now could anything be more fetching than that? I want to go there next summer, and don't you want to go too, you Scotch-Dutch, true-blue Puritan? Let's!"

Anastasia never fails to give me a rap about my Calvinism whenever she can. I am not a Calvinist by belief, but the thing is in my blood from three different strains—Dutch, Scotch, and Puritan. I never hear Calvinism mentioned in our churches, and the people who talk of it most are not Calvinists by creed or blood. As for An-

astasia, I have more than once referred her to one of the Thirty-nine Articles for Calvinism, or rather, for predestination. She admits that it is there, but she says the articles are not obligatory, nothing is but the creeds and the sacraments. She fails to see how I can be a Calvinist and a homeopath—the two things are so incongruous.

Anastasia and I are perfectly good-natured about what Cincinnatus calls the Episcopal-Presbyterian controversy. We never fail to talk theology, and we never lose our tempers. So far from trying to proselyte me, she says that life would be much duller if we thought alike on this subject. Anastasia's people were Romanists on one side and Congregationalists on the other. She is what one would logically expect her to be —a Low-Church woman. That is, she says she is low, when she contemplates extreme ritualism; but when she talks to Cincinnatus, who is lower than she, she flies over to the High-Church party. Cincinnatus once called her a Ritualistic Puritan, which was very well said, as Anastasia herself admitted.

I keep going back to the Presbyterian minister, the Calvinistic saint. This is by no means the first time she has mentioned him. Oh, my pro-

phetic soul, what if he should be a widower? I shall ask for particulars. Wouldn't it be strange if Anastasia should marry a Presbyterian minister? She thought it great fun when Rosalind, with "meetin'-house tendencies," married a ritualistic clergyman. "The whirligig of time brings revenges." To think of Anastasia gracing a manse and teaching the Westminster Catechism in Sunday-school! It is the last thing she would think of doing, and Anastasia always does the unexpected thing. The more I think of it, the more certain I am. Anastasia is miserable, but of course she would be under the circumstances. I wish I dared tell Cincinnatus my idea, but I dare not even hint it. I shouldn't dare, even if I were married and had a husband who appreciated a joke as much as I should expect my husband to. This is what Anastasia wrote me only this summer:

"Honor, if you were married would you pass your letters over to your husband? I know you wouldn't, but if you did, I should—I think I should send you directions for making crocheted tidies."

No; it would never do to tell Cincinnatus my fears. But there is no one else to tell, and I am

really worried about Anastasia. If she is thinking about the widower I am worried, and if she isn't I want to know what is troubling her.

. . . . . .

I find that I have been unnecessarily anxious about her. There may be something in the affair of the widower, but she has had a birthday. At least, I judge so from the verses which she has just sent me from Maine, with an apology for their unsymmetrical feet. This is the poem: I value it as a "human document," not as poetry.

ACCORDING TO THE CALENDAR

This is the last of my youth with its passionate joy and its pain.
After the heat and the drought, the long, silver sweep of the rain;
After the flash and the roar, the murmur, the swirl at the pane;
After the blue August days the summer is breaking in rain.

This is the last of my youth, the cry, "It is over and past."
Stay with me, piercing regret; stay with me, tempest and blast;
Beat on the roof and the brain; the house and the life will outlast.

True, there is more of the year; gold through the leaves of the vine,
Grapes, the bright hearth with its cheer, snow, and the far starlight shine;
The thought and the friend and the work, sweetly sweet fancies be mine.

Only no more the March gale, April and brown-budding leaf;
The triumph, the joy, the despair, restlessness, longing, and grief;
Who would give these for dull peace; life for content and relief?

Then stay with me, wind of the South, drive the dank leaves
'gainst the pane;
Pour from the eaves and the heart, the floodgates are open again.
When all is spent, men will say, "The summer has broken in
rain."

I am sorry that Anastasia is in the slough of despond again. Still, she is much more cheerful than she used to be. There was a time in her life when she would have thanked a boat to upset or a trolley-car to run over her, but for several years she has been very anxious to live. She has told me, and laughed at herself at the same time, that she wanted to live to be eighty. I was surprised at the change in her, but I was glad that she was in such a healthy state of mind. As she said, it looked as if she were in love, but it was only what Cincinnatus, when he wants to be learned, calls "*euphoria*," or more simply, joy in living. I have none too much of it myself, nor has Cincinnatus. I suppose it is a matter of temperament, which we have to fight. I am sorry for poor little Anastasia, all alone in her cottage, with an autumn rain and the blues and the birthday. But she will probably come out of her spell all right, for she has her house. But she must soon leave it, poor child. I don't know what I should do if I had to leave mine for eight months

in the year. Anastasia said when she built her house that she did it to have an object in life, and I can see that the little camp, as she often calls it, has done wonders for her. I built mine because I was tired of boarding, but it has made me a better woman. If I were a specialist and had nervous, hysterical women to deal with, I should prescribe a dose of house-building. Oftentimes when a woman thinks she wants to die it is a house she wants instead of a grave.

I will write to Anastasia at once, and warn her that she is in a bad way when she "drops into poetry." She might much rather read "The Seven Seas."

Another letter from the cottage is more cheerful. The spell was partly due to the birthday, and partly to the fact that she must soon leave New England. I wish I had the feeling for any place which she has for New England. There are no trees like her pointed firs, there are no shadows like New England shadows, even the stone fences are different from "York State" fences. I can't see the difference. One day when we were out walking along some woods back of my own town, I called her attention to a haze which reminded me of New England.

"Nothing but malaria," she said contemptuously. Nothing in Jersey suits her unless it be my house.

Anastasia loves hills, and I don't care for them. I can't live far from the sea, and Anastasia always turns her back on it. I believe I should die if I had to live in one of the inland States. When I have been away from the coast even for a few days I feel like the ten thousand Greeks, and cry, "The sea! The sea!" when I come back to it.

I feel relieved about Anastasia. She seems to be in a more normal condition, and she is hard at work upon a story. I told her not to come back without it. She needs pushing, so far as her writing is concerned. "I almost hope you won't call me lazy," she writes. "I have accomplished a good deal, despite housekeeping and the blues. Oh, my story, how I love it! Very likely no one else will, but that does not matter now. Not Charlotte Bronté on her moors was more blessed than I yesterday. I wrote 'hot-foot,' as they say in 'The Jungle-Book'—so appropriate to writing—driving right through the most difficult part of the story. Then I went out and walked and watched the sullen gray clouds rolling up from the purple hills, till the white mists under-

neath burned away in the sunset. I don't suppose I can find a publisher for my novel when it is done; nevertheless, I haven't felt so ridiculously young and happy for years as I have during the last two days. 'We all have been drunk once.'"

CHAPTER XIX

MAUD and Paul were married in June. It was a very grand wedding in the most fashionable church in town. Emma and John reasoned that they had only one daughter, and no expense should be spared. So there was a white satin gown, a real lace veil, a maid of honor, eight bridesmaids, and two clergymen to perform the ceremony. Maud made a beautiful bride, and Paul was very handsome in his happiness. I believe he is thoroughly happy. The wedding took place at high noon, and after a sumptuous breakfast the bridal pair left for an extended tour.

After the rice and old shoes had been thrown and the bridal party had driven away, I came home. Emma urged me to stay, pleading her loneliness, but I had work which must be done, and I promised to go again soon.

Cincinnatus and I came away together, for of course he was at the wedding. Emma kissed me effusively, and whispered that any time I wanted to be married from her house she would give me

a fashionable wedding. But she supposed it would be more like me to go to the parson. As I had no idea of any affair of that kind, I could not be enthusiastic; but I thanked her, for I knew she spoke from the kindness of her heart. She kept me so long that Cincinnatus and I nearly lost our train. We rushed up the station steps, and when we took our seats in the train we were panting like the two stout, middle-aged people that we are.

Of course, we talked about the wedding, and Cincinnatus spoke of the bride's beauty, ending his remarks by saying, "I dare say they will get on very well together. After all, it may be a most sensible match. I should be sorry to think that our gay Maud might ever be unhappy. Her first twenty years have been good to her."

"Yes, Maudie has had a good time, and it is right that she should. I hope her husband will not attempt to make her keep the promise she just gave—to obey him."

"I don't think he will have much success if he tries it," and Cincinnatus's eyes twinkled. "I am thankful to Maud for marrying him. I feared lest that Dutch-Scotch-New-England conscience which Anastasia is always talking about might

lead you to think that you ought to marry him."

"My dear Cincinnatus, I told you very plainly that he did not want me."

"What, what?" Cincinnatus demanded. "You are telling me the truth, and not something which you imagine to be the truth?"

"Certainly; he told me so much in my own study."

"Brutal!" Cincinnatus muttered between his teeth.

"Oh, no. I was glad to know it. Since he asked me to release him I could not blame myself for being such a cheap thing as to change."

"Honor, tell me one thing, please. Did you love this man?"

"Not since he came back from Russia. I hope you haven't been thinking that I was carrying about a broken heart."

"You didn't act like it, but I scarcely know what I have thought during the last few months. I—— This is our station, Honor."

I went directly to the study as soon as I had changed my gown, and began to write at my desk. In a few moments I looked across the lawn and saw Cincinnatus take his seat before

his desk. He glanced up and nodded good-naturedly. Then we both began to write.

After we reached home it began to rain, and it soon settled down into a steady downpour. It was a cold rain, such as we sometimes have in June. I was thankful that the sun had peeped out for a few moments that morning, while Maud was on her way from church. Emma had quoted, "Happy is the bride that the sun shines on."

Cincinnatus came over after dinner, with his hands full of proofs. We always read each other's proofs, and we were soon deep in these, which were for a collection of essays. I had read these papers, of course, as they had appeared in magazines, but they had been polished and largely rewritten. When the proofs were finished I got out the chafing-dish and cooked an appetizing little supper. The storm had increased, and it dashed furiously against the windows, but we did not mind. Cincinnatus had made a blaze on the hearth, and he roamed about the room, handling the books, just as he had done for years, and I felt that one of us had been away and come home again.

Emma wrote me the most extravagant letters

about Maud's happiness, and she always spoke of Paul as "my son." I had to smile at this, for Paul is a few months older than Emma, and only three years John's junior. I could not help reading these letters to Cincinnatus, who was properly appreciative.

When Mr. and Mrs. Richmond returned from their wedding-journey I had the pleasure of entertaining them. The little house put on its best attire, and the modern equivalent of the fatted calf furnished forth my table. Cincinnatus sent over the best of everything his garden afforded, and Leavitt fairly outdid herself with the cooking. Before Maud and Paul left I gave them a dinner to which I invited all the young people with whom Maud had associated while staying with me. She was very proud of her husband, notwithstanding there were young men present. Paul looked well, and he had what Emma calls "an air." I am satisfied that Maudie has "married well."

Paul is about to build a fine house near John's, so Emma need not be separated from her only child. I saw the plans, and there is no denying that the house will be beautiful, even elegant. But when my guests were gone, and I had my

own little house to myself again, I was glad that I had it alone, instead of having a part in a finer and larger one. I found myself very thankful during those days, just for what, I was not sure.

CHAPTER XX

One afternoon in early fall, as I came in from a calling expedition, Leavitt told me that Mr. King had left a parcel for me. I would find it on my study-table; he had asked her to put it there. When I had put away my hat and gloves, I opened the parcel. As I expected, it was a copy of Cincinnatus's new book. It was just out; the ink was scarcely dry. He always gives me an autograph copy of his books, and I turned to the fly-leaf for the inscription, which is always a characteristic one. The pages were blank, but a sheet of paper dropped to the floor. It was Cincinnatus's own letter paper, a square sheet of heavy linen, with his coat-of-arms at the top. I should know it anywhere. Across the sheet were written these two lines:

> "'Take them, love, the book and me together;
> Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also.'"

It was nice of Cincinnatus, after all his railing against Robert Browning, to propose to me in Browningese. I don't pretend to say that I

hadn't known for some time what was coming. I might have seen it years ago if I had not had my mind so full of Paul, and had not given Cincinnatus to understand that I had had the one love affair of my life. Was I sorry that I had not known the truth long ago, and that Cincinnatus had not known it too? I could not tell. I put the paper in a secret drawer in my desk, and sat down to look the book over. It was like Cincinnatus, that sheaf of papers on life and letters. I remembered that he had said, when we were reading the proof: "This book holds my highest convictions of life and art." It was a scholarly book, and, better yet, it was a manly book. Who was I to have the writer send me those two lines from the most perfect love-poem ever written by a man?

Cincinnatus came over that evening and proposed to me in due form. I noticed that he wore a spick-span new evening dress, and had a white carnation in his buttonhole.

I will not repeat what he said. I always avoid love-scenes as much as possible when I write my stories. I knew at last that for twelve years I had lived so near this quiet man, who would have given all that he had in the world for the privi-

lege of lifting one of my burdens, but who kept silence because he thought my heart was with my girlhood's lover. I was touched at this. Oh, I was moved as nothing since Paul's leaving twenty years ago had moved me, but I was not sure what this feeling meant. I had been mistaken once; I could not afford to make another mistake. I sent Cincinnatus home without any definite answer. I think he did not expect it so soon. I told him that I had been conscious of his change of attitude toward me, that I appreciated all he offered me, but that I did not understand myself, and till I did we must be friends and nothing more.

"I trust that we shall always be friends, Honor," he said gravely. "Even if the worst should happen, I can not bear to think that we shall not be friends and neighbors. You may take your own time. I shall not speak of this again if you will promise to tell me when you are sure of yourself."

I promised, and we shook hands cordially and said good-night.

I told no one what had transpired, not even Anastasia, altho she came only the next day to spend Sunday with me. She was jubilant over

Paul's marriage, and I thought she took delight in thinking what a mistake he and Maud had made. Anastasia is almost spiteful at times. I am a transparent creature to my intimate friends, and Anastasia soon saw that something unusual was occupying my attention. Had Cincinnatus and I quarreled? she asked. I told her that we were quite as good friends as ever, which was true. Nothing could happen to make us anything but friends.

Anastasia fell upon Cincinnatus's new book, and skimmed it over before she slept that night. "I like that man," was her only comment. "Some of his heresies, the Kipling one, for instance, are enough to make one tear one's hair, but I give him credit for thinking he is right. It is a great thing to have a man friend like Cincinnatus. It is almost impossible for a woman to have a man for a friend; he is sure to make love to her and spoil everything."

I was not quite sure what to make of this last sentence. Had Anastasia recently learned the futility of a Platonic friendship, or was she trying to draw me out about Cincinnatus? I let the subject drop. I was not ready to talk about Cincinnatus, not even to Anastasia.

Several weeks went by, and Cincinnatus and I read and talked and played chess together, as usual. I was not much better acquainted with Honor Sharpe than I was the day when I found the lines from Browning in the book. Still, I found myself arguing thus to myself—if I thought I loved one man and was mistaken, might I not love another without realizing it? All my long years' study of human nature, all the love-stories I had written, stood me in no stead when the story was my own.

My eyes were opened suddenly. One afternoon late in the fall I was driving a few miles out of town, when I overtook Cincinnatus walking, an unusual thing for him. He explained, as he accepted a seat in my buggy, that he was walking by the advice of his physician, and that he was doing his five miles a day, tho he hoped soon to double the distance. He had walked far enough for to-day, and he was glad to take the seat beside me. No; he was not ill, he replied, in answer to my question, but the doctor thought he did not exercise enough, and, besides, he feared he was growing too stout.

I headed Bonnie for the open country, and promised Cincinnatus to show him a fine display

of color when we should come to my favorite wood. Bonnie had had her run, and I allowed her to suit herself about her gait, while Cincinnatus and I discussed local politics.

Suddenly Cincinnatus spoke, "Look ahead!" He jerked the reins as he spoke, pulling the horse sharply to the right. Just ahead of us, and coming toward us, was a horse, drawing a light buggy, in which sat a young girl. She had lost all control of the horse, and, as he dashed along, the buggy swayed frightfully. I drove Bonnie into the ditch to give the runaway room. It all happened in a fraction of the time it takes to write it. Cincinnatus leaped from my buggy, and, at just the right moment, seized the plunging, terrified beast. I closed my eyes, and I think I tried to pray. I know I said to myself, "Oh, why did I not give him his answer long ago?" I knew myself then. In a moment I heard Cincinnatus talking to the horse in steady, persuasive tones. He has a peculiar power over animals. I opened my eyes; there had been a struggle, for Cincinnatus was covered with mud, and his hat lay in the road. The horse was still trembling, but he stood still.

As soon as he could, Cincinnatus came to me.

"All right, Honor. You were frightened, for you are as pale as a ghost. No wonder, for we came dangerously near a collision. You won't mind if I drive the young lady home? She is too nervous to trust herself again. You are sure that you are not nervous now?"

I assured him that I was quite myself, tho I wanted to scream with suppressed excitement. My horse was quivering, but, like the little thoroughbred she is, she stood her ground and did not attempt to run.

Cincinnatus went back to the other buggy and spoke reassuringly to the girl, while he patted the horse. Then he picked up the battered hat and put it on. I thought of Dr. Holmes's words, "The hat is the vulnerable portion of the artificial integument," and smiled; but to me Cincinnatus could not have looked better if he had worn a halo.

He took his seat beside the frightened girl and drove away, I following. The horse behaved very well, tho he was nervous. Cincinnatus turned into a farmyard, and, after leaving the horse in the care of the farmer, came out and waited for me. He must have seen that I was disturbed, for he took the reins from me with-

out speaking, and I know he hates to drive my horse.

We scarcely spoke on the way home. Cincinnatus drove into my yard, and, after giving Bonnie over to George, turned to go home.

"Come in," I said. "I want to tell you something." I closed the door, then sank down on the old oak settle in the hall. "Cincinnatus, I know—I understand myself at last. That moment you were in danger showed me very clearly——"

I did not need to finish the sentence. Cincinnatus did not speak, but his face—how could I ever have thought him plain?—was glorified. He stooped and kissed me.

We were not sentimental, and we soon adjusted ourselves to our new relations. Presently I left him in the parlor, reading *The Evening Post*, while I went to dress for dinner. He was to stay and dine, of course. I put on a dark red gown which Cincinnatus particularly likes, and I wore some of the roses with which he has kept my desk supplied for years. I placed him at the foot of the table, and he carved the roast as if he were already the head of the house.

We were not sentimental that evening. Cin-

cinnatus asked me to call him Archibald, which is his own right name. I told him that Cincinnatus seemed much more natural to me, but he said that our new relation seemed to call for some change in the form of address. I agreed to use Archibald when speaking to him—that is, when I did not forget and call him Cincinnatus. I would use the old name when speaking of him to Anastasia and other intimate friends. He stayed till eleven, and we finished the evening with a game of chess, as usual.

Cincinnatus came over next morning and brought me a ring which had been his mother's, a large diamond in an old-fashioned setting. I took off the sapphire and the little diamond which I always wear on my left hand; the sapphire I put on my right hand, but I gave the little diamond to Cincinnatus, and he fastened it on his watch-chain.

Cincinnatus asked me to drive with him behind the cobs at four, and I agreed. He went home to his study, and I went up to mine, and we began to write, as befitted two sensible, middle-aged people who had just become engaged.

CHAPTER XXI

If I were writing an old-fashioned novel I should write "L'envoi" over this chapter, instead of numbering it. Cincinnatus, who always looks over a book from the end to the beginning, says he invariably reads a book which has L'envoi over the last chapter, because it is sure to be wholesome and old-fashioned.

There is little to tell in my last chapter. Cincinnatus and I still occupy our respective houses, but we are to be married in March. It took us some time to decide which house we should live in; whether Cincinnatus should write essays in mine or I should write novels in his. He left the decision to me, and, of course, I felt that I could not give up my house. I know that Cincinnatus can not feel about his house as I do about mine. As Anastasia says about her own cottage, "I bought it with the blood of my heart and the years of my youth." Cincinnatus did not build his, he merely bought one which some one else built, and there can't be so much sentiment

about such a house. The only argument in favor of his was that it is larger than mine. After much thought I proposed that we build a study for him on the north side of my house. He does not care for a sunny study; his own has a northern exposure. The idea suited Cincinnatus, and the study is well under way. The wing will not detract from the appearance of my house in the least, and it will not only give Cincinnatus a study, it will add a large room to the second floor.

When Cincinnatus told Mrs. Barton, his cousin-housekeeper, that he was to be married, she went about looking as if the world were about to come to an end. I suggested to him that she was probably praying that something would happen to carry me off before the wedding-day. Cincinnatus told her that he intended to pension her—she is alone and poor—and since then she has seemed quite resigned to leave him to his fate.

Mrs. Barton is the only person who does not seem pleased. Rosalind wrote me a jubilant letter. "Another new woman has succumbed," was her opening sentence. Her own marriage has been such a success that she wants every woman to marry. She says, and with truth, that Cin-

cinnatus and I take little risk, because we are so used to each other's ways. She and her husband are so unlike that it is almost a miracle that they did not quarrel. I believe that Rosalind is happy. She makes a model clergyman's wife, and I don't doubt her word when she says she would not go back to the Woman's Page if she could. Rosalind's testimony is of great importance.

Anastasia says but little, except that she is satisfied, and that she saw this ending to my story long ago. No doubt she did, but she was wise enough not to tell me what she thought. She is quite exercised over the wedding. Cincinnatus being a Churchman, she wishes to see him properly married in his own church, but she fears that my Presbyterian proclivities will make me decide upon a home wedding. Cincinnatus does not seem to care how it is done, so it is done.

Aunt Frances wrote me every day for a week after my engagement to say, "I told you so." She is pleased that I have come to my senses "before it is too late." Evidently she regards me as "a brand plucked from the burning." She, too, saw this coming long ago.

Emma is happy, thoroughly happy. She has always been rather ashamed of having an unmar-

ried sister-in-law. She wrote me a most affectionate letter, in which she mingled congratulations, advice about managing husbands, and suggestions regarding my trousseau, in a bewildering manner. She feels now that she can truly enjoy Maud's happiness and prosperity. I believe that the good, tedious soul thinks I gave Paul up to Maud, and took Cincinnatus as a "makeshift." I needn't mind her thinking so; Cincinnatus and I know better.

All my friends are pleased and satisfied, and I am the better satisfied because they think it a sensible match. Leavitt and George are delighted, and I am glad to have their approval, for they are as sensible people as any I know. These faithful servitors will still minister to our wants, and there will be no stoppage of the domestic machinery. I am glad to be able to say that George has become what may be called "steady." I think he is saved from himself. He may fall again, but I know that Cincinnatus—I suppose I should say Archibald—will go after him and pick him up, and George will come back and begin anew. Not every missionary effort succeeds so well as this one of Cincinnatus's, for it is more his than mine. It is not only what Cincinnatus

has done for George that has helped him; it is what he has been before him. His daily "walk and conversation" have been an object-lesson which has done George more good than volumes of precept. I don't think that Cincinnatus ever preached to him; I can't imagine him doing it.

Leavitt has come to believe in George's reformation, and she looks ten years younger than she used to. She goes smiling about the house, and if she does not sing her Magnificat, I know she thinks it. Neither she nor George will hear anything about leaving us, they seem perfectly satisfied to go on as they are. I turned the attic over to them long ago, banishing my cherished herbs. I had masons and paper-hangers come, and the whole attic is neatly plastered and papered. Here George has his den, and here he collects books, to Cincinnatus's delight. Here, too, he works at some mechanical invention which he confidently expects will bring him fame and fortune some day. Cincinnatus proposes to build Leavitt and George a small house on his lot, which is large enough to be divided. It is no more than they deserve. If I had my way, everybody would have a house.

I find that I afford Anastasia much amusement

during these latter days. She was almost hilarious when I told her my suspicions anent the Gaelic-Presbyterian minister, and she teased me well because I was not able to resist my sympathetic inclination to "leave 'em all in couples," instead of abandoning her after the manner of that stern parent, modern realism. Anastasia insists on talking as if my own true story were one of my written ones. She says that this leaving her out in the cold is more artistic than if she married the Gaelic-Presbyterian widower; it supplies that little note of sad sincerity which is the true minor *motif*. She has insisted on calling herself the minor *motif* ever since Cincinnatus and I became engaged. For her own sake I could wish her to look at life less impersonally. She assured me that she did not in the least mind my thinking that she was in love with the widower. Indeed, she was willing that I should imagine her flirting with a Theosophist if it were necessary to feed the fires of my imagination. It was, no doubt, the shadow of my own coming fate which led me wrong about Anastasia, instead of my artistic instinct leading me right, as it usually does, "if I do say it as shouldn't."

By the way, Anastasia did not carry out her

purpose of joining a sisterhood. She went so far as to offer herself, but she was told that the need was for plastic young women. She realized that she is not a plastic young woman, and she cheerfully abandoned the whole matter and went back to her teaching. I think she is satisfied, for the novel is growing, and it bids fair to be the best thing she has done.

It is February, and March will follow, but I am not afraid. I always supposed that marriage must be the most solemn event to contemplate, more solemn, even, than death, and that if I ever came face to face with such an issue, I should be half crazed from weighing the matter. But I think very little. I am serene and content. Why should I worry? I trust Cincinnatus and I trust myself. There will be no change; I shall write my stories and he will write his essays, and after the day's work is done we shall quarrel over books and art, or play duets or have a game of chess, as of old.

I have no fear that Cincinnatus will not like my housekeeping. He knows all about it, after the time he has spent in my house. As Rosalind says, we understand each other's ways. How well I remember the last letter she sent me be-

fore her marriage, beginning, "*Te morituri salutamus!*" She was half minded, then, to turn back, poor child. One of her objections to marriage was that she must use her husband's money. That does not worry me at all, tho I have seen the time when it might. That notion has gone with other spinster notions. I am glad that Cincinnatus is what Aunt Frances calls "well off," and I am glad, also, that I have an income of my own. I fancy we shall not quarrel about financial matters.

I have been very happy under my own roof. Perhaps it is a dangerous experiment to turn it from a spinster's den into a family dwelling, but Archibald—there! I did remember—is a most orderly, methodical man, and he will keep his books and papers in his own domain. He will never use my fountain pen nor borrow my mucilage. I know I can never love him enough to want him to work in my study. George Eliot and George Lewes worked together, but I can't see how two such nervous people got along. Cincinnatus is no genius, neither am I, but I am sure that no study would be large enough for us both.

The new study is nearly done. I didn't sup-

pose, when I built my house, that I should ever enlarge it to make a study for my husband. If I had dreamed of such a thing it would have been for Paul. How little one knows what one really wants! If Paul had not come from Russia this happiness would never have come to me, for Cincinnatus says he would have respected my devotion to my past, and never have intruded his own wishes upon me.

As I said, I am not afraid. Of course, one can not foretell the future, but I dare say if, in after time, any one should think it worth while to write another chapter about Cincinnatus and me, it would end as did the dear old fairy tales, "and so they were married and lived together happily ever after."

THE END